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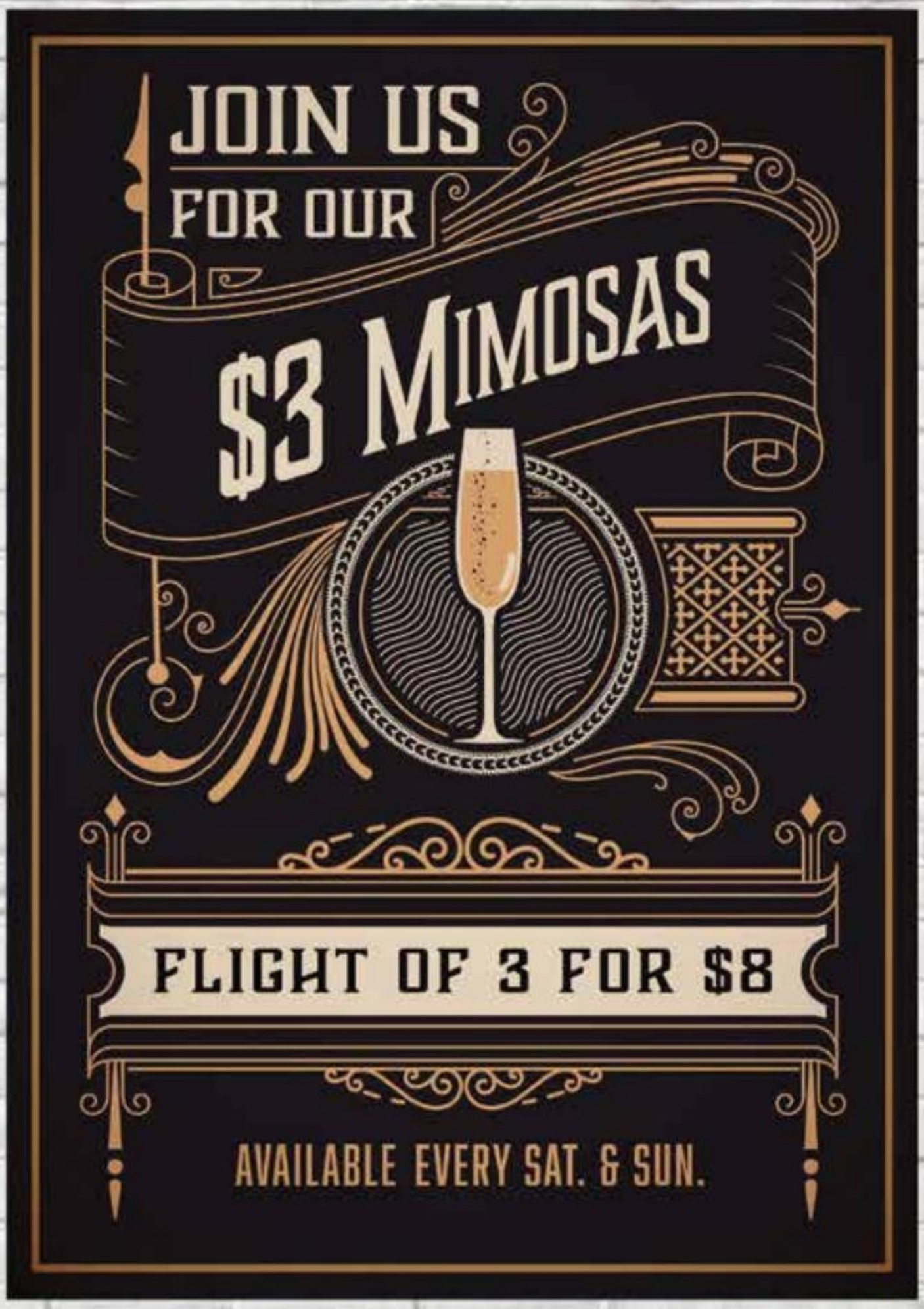

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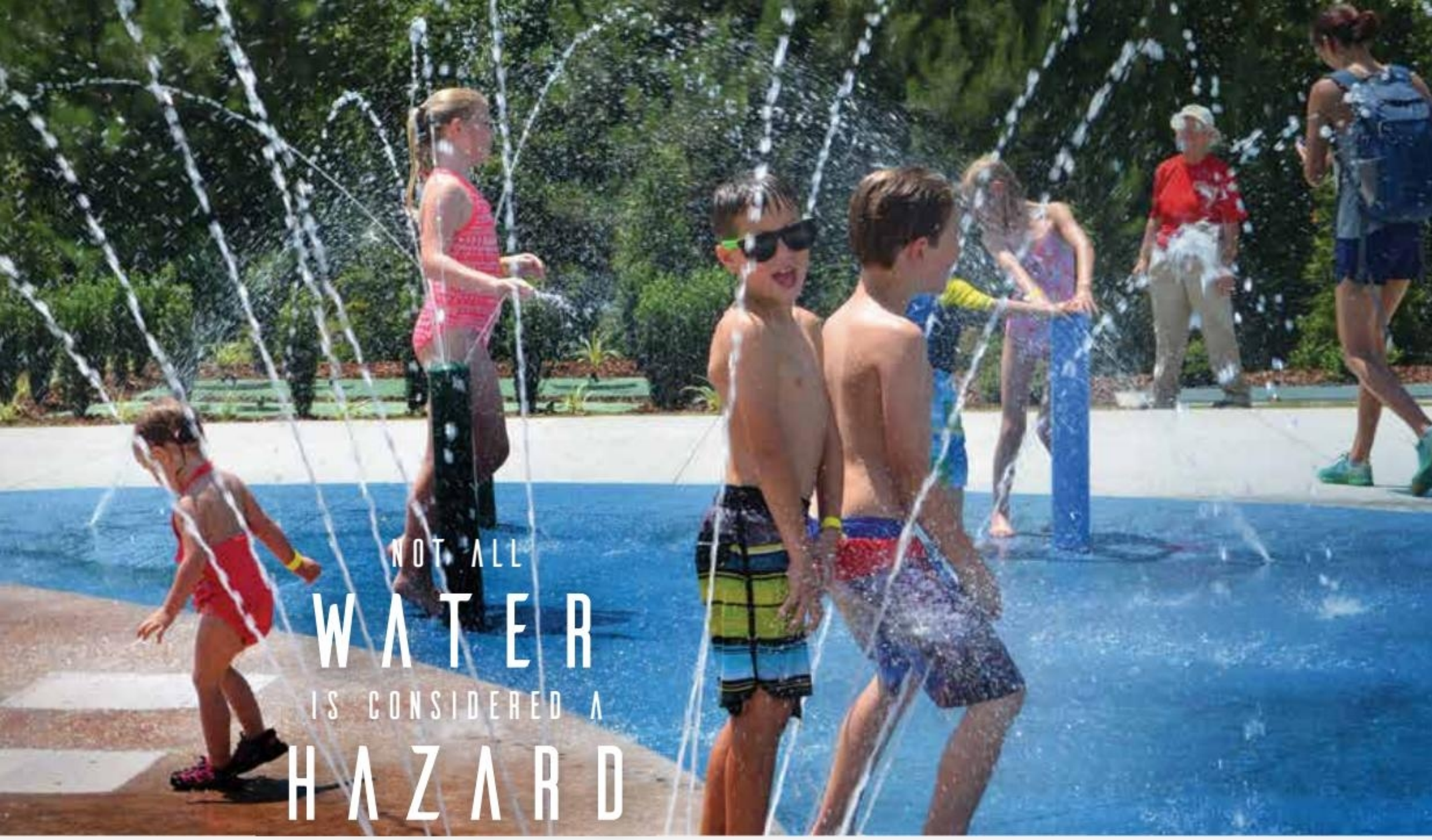

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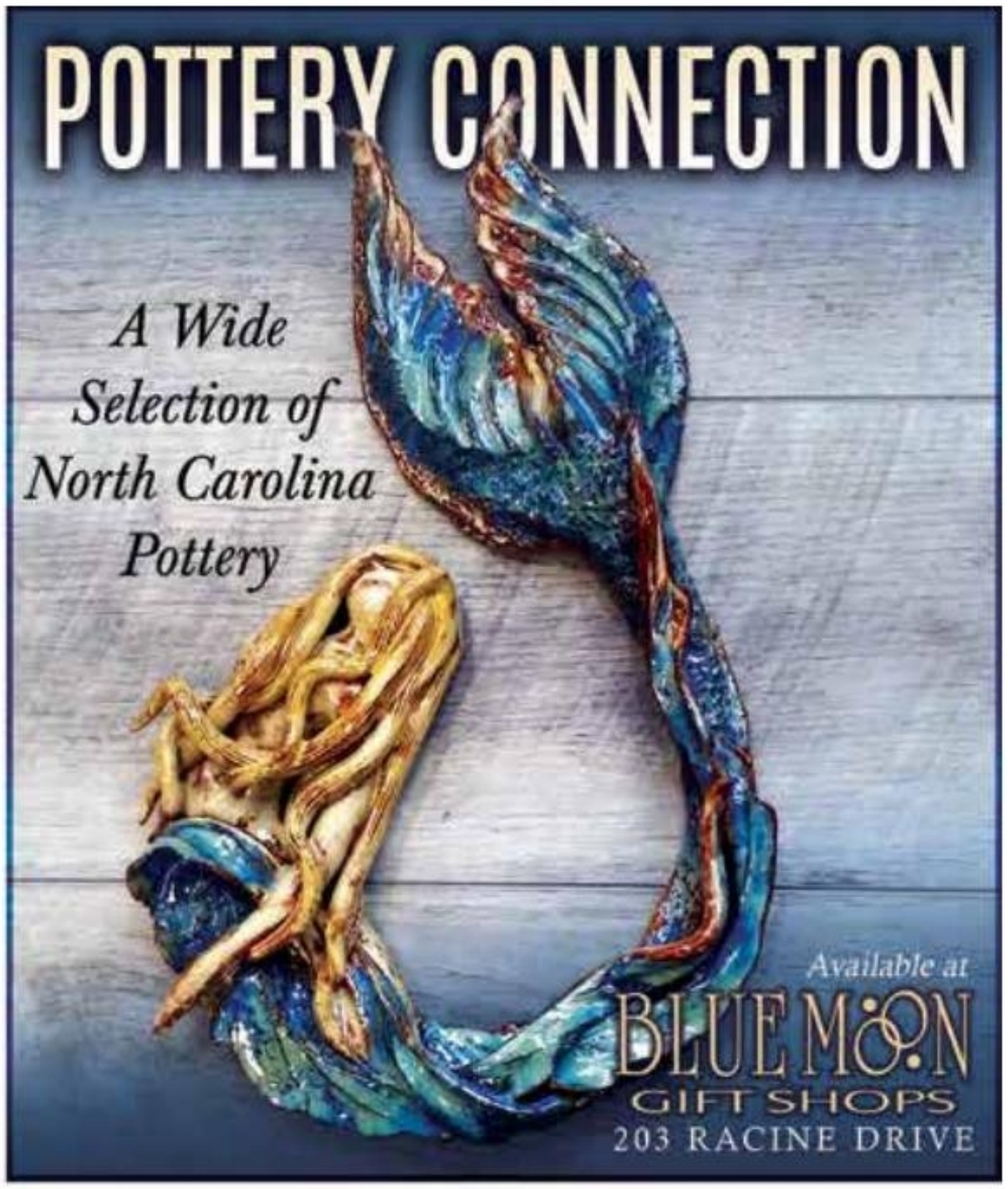
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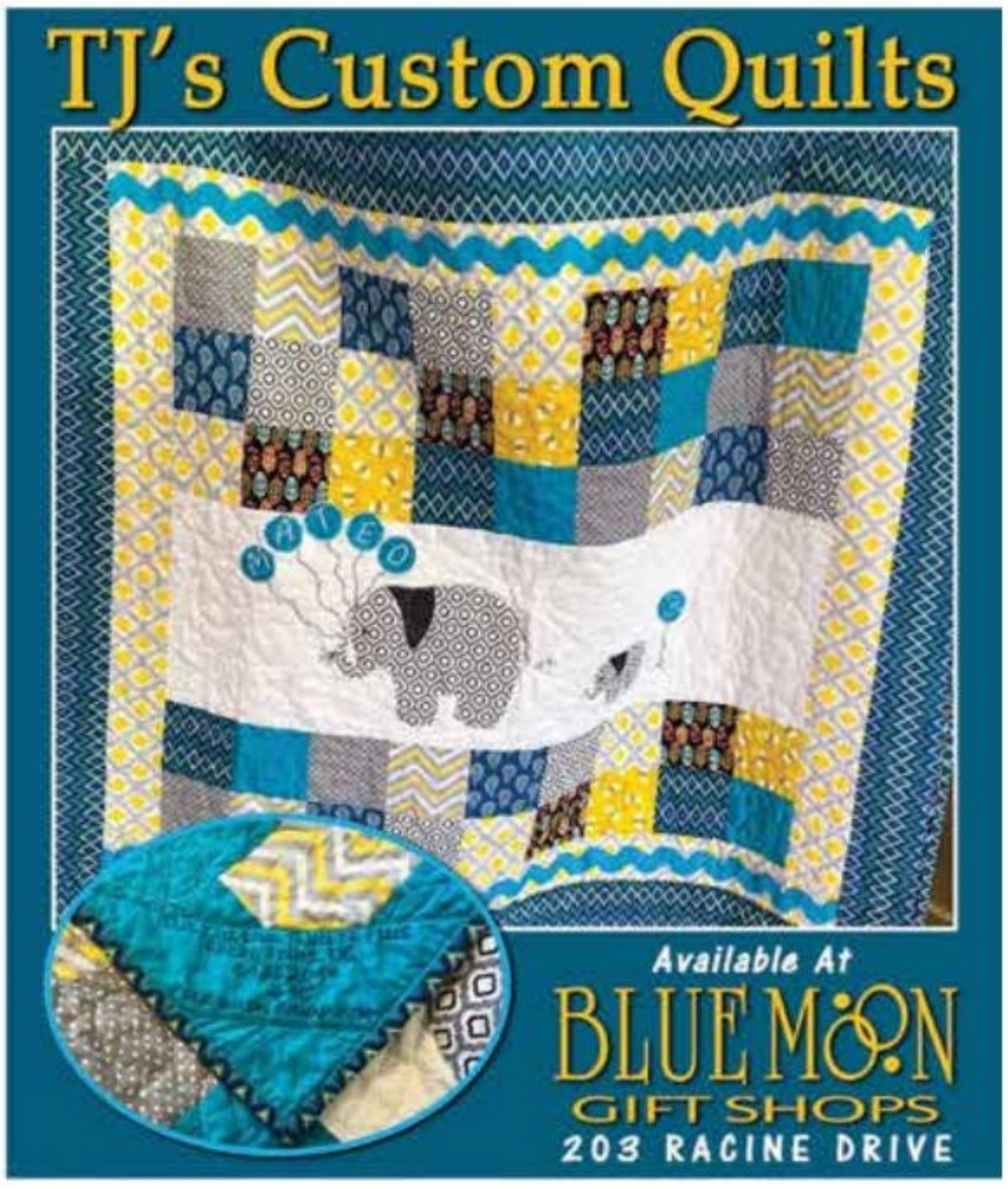
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MAGAZINE

VOLUME 7, NO. 2

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Confessions of a Happy Old Guy

And the joys of life in the slow lane

By Jim Dodson

A close colleague needed to speak in confidence the other day. She looked so serious.

"I don't know how to tell you this," she said, "but I have to tell you something important."

I feared she might be quitting her job to join a kazoo band or something even worse, appear on a reality show. So I braced for impact.

"I was behind you in traffic yesterday. You drive like an old man!"

She burst out laughing.

I laughed, too — and agreed with her. She wasn't the first to point out my maddening old-fashioned driving habits, or as I prefer to simply call them, *careful*. For the record I haven't had a moving violation in 40 years, something one can accomplish only by moving slowly through the busy intersections of life. Knock wood.

A year ago, however, I turned 65. In the eyes of my government, my insurance agent and my beloved colleague, this apparently means I've achieved official Old Man status. So essentially, my driving habits are finally catching up to my age.

Over this year, in fact, since word has spread like kudzu on a redneck barn, I've received several "special dinner" invitations from companies eager to tell me all about their exciting products and services designed to "make your senior years happier, safer and more fulfilling."

One was from a lawyer pointing out the dangers of failing to update my final will and testament, presumably so craven heirs don't rob me blind. Another was from a financial firm eager to feed me at the Olive Garden in order to convince me that I should try a reverse mortgage that would allow me to sell my house piece-by-piece in order to finance a speedboat or buy a timeshare in Cabo San Lucas. Not long after that, two dinner invites from local funeral homes offered a fancy last supper with small talk of coffins over coffee.

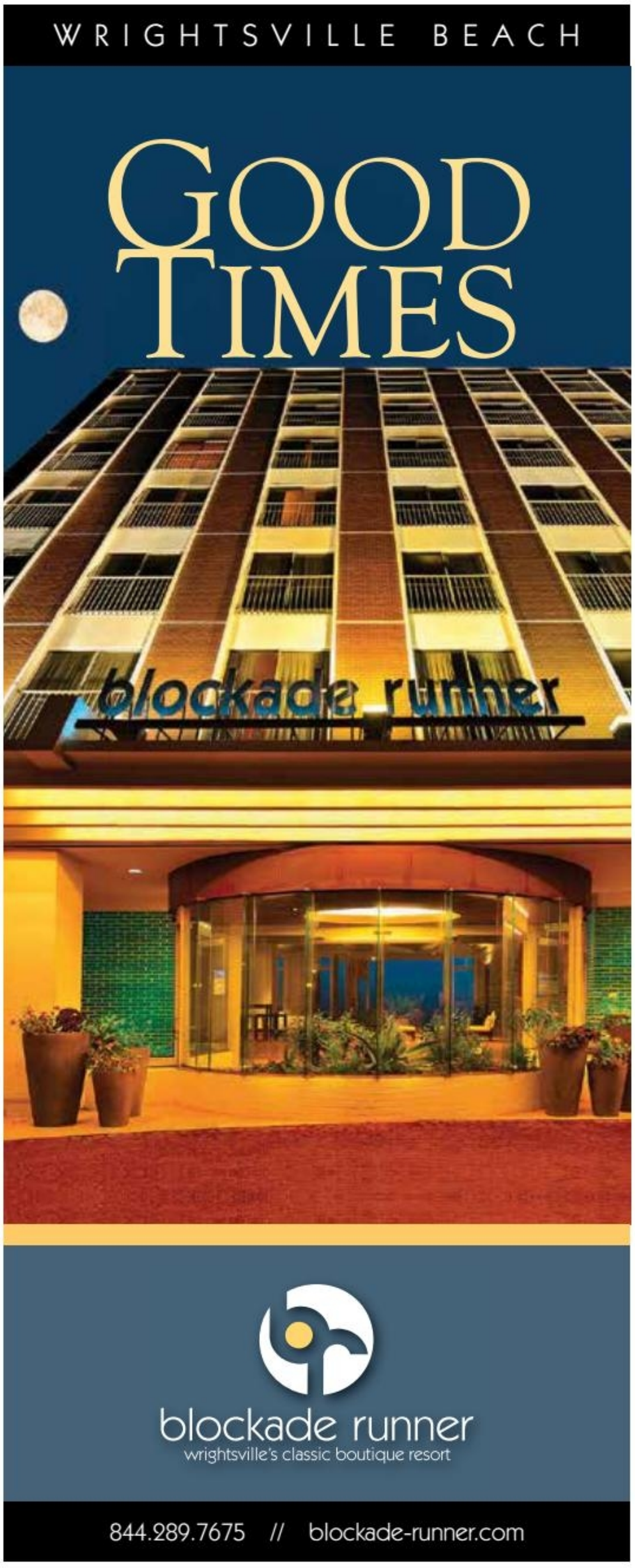
The truth is, I'm perfectly fine officially being an Old Guy. I've never felt happier or more fulfilled than at this very moment, even without a speedboat. My health is good, the important parts all seem to work, I love what I do every day and look forward to many years of doing it as I chug along in the slow lane of life.

I never plan to retire or even slow down because I've always moved at more or less the same modest speed. Slow and steady wins the race, as the moral goes, assuming you even care about winning the rat race. *Never hurry, never worry* was the personal motto of the late great Walter Hagen, a dapper fellow who walked slow and lived large while winning 45 golf tournaments, a total that included 11 major championships and four British Opens. Successful living, said the late great Leroy Robert Paige, a.k.a. "Satchel," — hall-of-fame Major League pitcher who played his last game for the Peninsula Grays of the Carolina League at age 60 in 1966 — is really a question of mind over matter. "If you don't mind," he counseled, "it don't matter."

Besides, the evidence is pretty compelling that I've been an old man since the day I was born.

A small chronological sampling:

It's February, 1953, and I am born. My mother thinks I'm the cutest baby ever. My father jokes that I look like Dwight D. Eisenhower. My mother doesn't think this is funny, doesn't speak to my father for a week. Years later, whenever she's annoyed with me, she'll sigh and say,



"I guess you were just *born* an old man, Sugar Pie."

It's 12 years later, 1965. My favorite Beatle is George Harrison, the "quiet one" whose guitar gently weeps. I teach myself guitar and spend endless solitary hours learning to play like George. Paul McCartney tells the Associated Press that "George is the old man of the group." In tribute, I try growing a beard like George. It goes nowhere. Then again, I'm only in fifth grade.

Now we're in the early avocado-colored '70s. The music, the cars, the groovy way college girls look — it's all quite wonderful. I grow my hair long and spend an entire summer at college smoking pot, which only puts me to sleep. So I quit smoking pot, buy a Dr. Grabow pipe and a corduroy sports coat with leather elbow patches. My hippie girlfriend jokes that she's dating William F. Buckley and is shocked when I admit digging the music of Burt Bacharach. I am the only guy in my dorm who watches the Watergate Hearings from beginning to end — and enjoys it.

Now it's the 1980s and I'm an investigative reporter for a magazine in Atlanta, engaged to a beautiful TV anchorwoman who works late on weekends. Way past my normal bedtime, she likes to unwind from her job by dragging me to glamorous late-night parties where everyone is buzzing from funny white powder inhaled off the bathroom counter. More than once I sneak off to a stranger's bedroom to grab a quick nap or watch reruns of *Hee Haw* with a Falstaff beer. The engagement is predictably short.

In the late 1990s, I become a father of two, the happiest thing that's ever happened to me. I build my own house and a faux English garden deep in a beech forest near the coast of Maine. I love reading books to our little ones and normally fall asleep before they do. We like the same G-rated movies and yellow food group. They grow way too soon. Apparently I never did. But at least I am fully trained for grandparenthood.

Two summers ago, while driving my vintage Buick Roadmaster in crazy rush hour traffic outside Philadelphia, a snarky young dude in a BMW opened his window and yelled, "Hey, Chevy, wanna drag race me to Wallyworld?" He howled at his own wit. I smiled politely back. When the light changed, however, I opened up my Roadmaster's massive 350-hp, eight-cylinder Corvette engine and taught that little twerp never to mess with an old man driving his old man's Buick.

For the record, old guys like shirts with roomy pockets. This is a known fact and I'm no different. I want a shirt with pockets large enough for car keys, screwdrivers, grocery store lists, directions to the party, a sandwich for later, a tape measure, various auto parts, mysterious things you find in the yard and so forth. Pocket protectors, however, are ridiculous. What do you take me for, a complete old geek?

Also, long ago, I decided that certain essentials in life should primarily be basic white. This includes, but is not limited to, golf balls, toilet paper, underwear, snow, vanilla ice cream, dress shirts, and the look on any idiot BWM owner's face who thinks he can beat my Buick to Wallyworld. (By the way, genius, Chevy's wagon was a Ford).

If you're going to jabber during the movie, please do us both a big favor and sit elsewhere, preferably in another county. I have a hard enough time hearing what's going on in the movie without having to

listen to your witless commentary. And if you speak to me in a crowded party, don't be surprised if I just smile at you like a drooling village idiot because I can't understand a blessed word anyone says to me in noisy, crowded places.

Ditto if I forget your name. Please don't take it personally. Next time just wear your name tag — preferably written in LARGE EASILY DISCERNABLE LETTERS. For the record, I forget lots of names of things these days, including those of movie stars, old flames, neighbors, song titles, state capitals, sports stars, candidates I voted for, candidates I wish I voted for and so on. On the other hand, I can name every dog I ever owned, just one of many reasons a dog really is an old man's best friend. You never forget them.

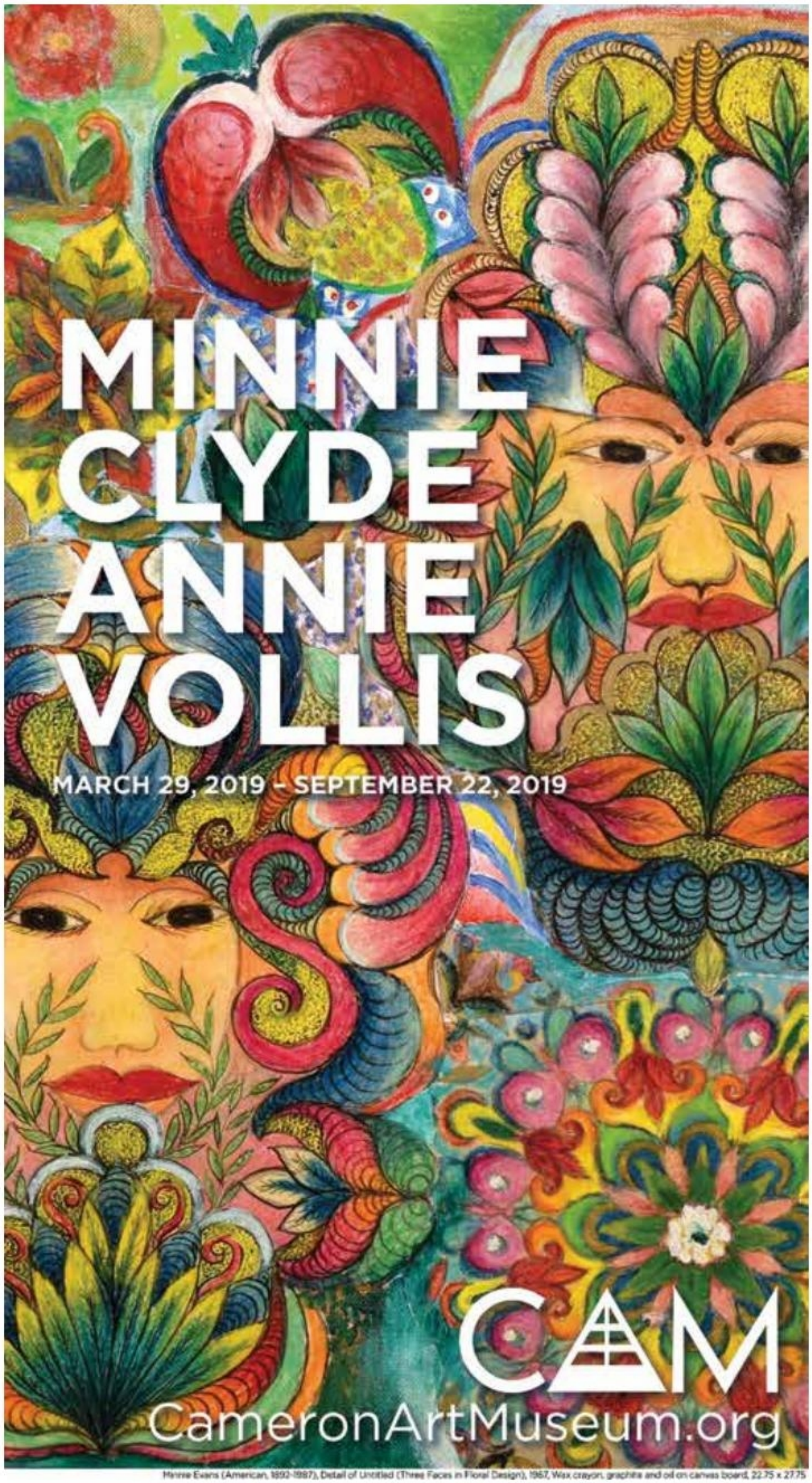
Finally, I love going to the grocery store without a shopping list. Talk about free-range fun for Old Guys! Roaming the aisles like a man on a mission who can't remember what he's looking for, I just grab whatever catches my fancy on the oft chance it might include whatever item my wife specifically asked me to bring home. True, this often means a quick return to the store to get the correct item but, hey, that just means you can repeat the process and double your fun, taking home other great stuff that captures your fancy.

Frankly, I could rattle on forever about the simple pleasures of finally being a certified Old Guy — going to bed early and rising *before* the chickens, reading poetry, biographies and histories in my tree house office, long walks with the dogs and road trips with my bride, small suppers with friends, stargazing, classical music, lonely back roads, rainy Sundays, weekend gardening, watching birds, early church, late afternoon naps, Kate Hepburn movies, historic battlegrounds, old houses, Scottish golf courses, expensive bourbon, bumping into old friends I actually remember, and other stuff I invariably forget how much I enjoy.

Whew, just the thought of all that activity exhausts me.

I'd better go grab a quick nap before I run to the store to fetch supper items I probably won't remember to get.

Contact Editor Jim Dodson at jim@thepilot.com.



Minnie Evans (American, 1892-1987), Detail of Untitled (Three Faces in Floral Design), 1967, Wax crayon, graphite and oil on canvas board, 22.75 x 27.75

SaltWorks

Garden in the Grove

Poplar Grove's Annual Herb Garden and Fair is always a great weekend of family fun, and this spring will be no exception. In addition to a huge selection of locally grown plants of all kinds — herbs, perennials, annuals, hanging baskets, shrubs and native plants — there will be self-guided house tours, Pender County master gardeners, nature classes, and a performance by artist and musician Mark Herbert from Broccoli Brothers Circus. Tickets: $5. Kids under 12 are admitted free. March 30, 9 a.m.-5 p.m; March 31, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. Info: (910) 395-5999 or poplargrove.org.

North Carolina Black Film Festival

Founded in 1998, the Black Arts Alliance serves as an advocate for African-American arts and culture in Wilmington, where they partner with local universities and institutions on creative projects. This year the group hosts the 16th annual North Carolina Black Film Festival on March 21-24. In addition to separate days devoted to student films on short subjects and family cinema, the festival will feature "Music in Film," a celebration of music associated with historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Tickets: $8-$50. Various venues in downtown Wilmington and UNCW. For info: (910) 431-9008 or blackartsalliance.org.

All That Jazz

The Afro Latin Jazz Ensemble (ALJE) is dedicated to the perpetuation of the music and heritage of Afro-Latin jazz. Led by pianist and musical director Arturo O'Farrill, the group performs contemporary compositions in the genre, honoring jazz pioneers such as Mario Bauza and Tito Puente. The ALJE has performed at the Cubadisco Festival in Havana, the Luminato Festival in Toronto, and Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival in Massachusetts. Tickets: $25-$75. March 5, 7:30 p.m. Kenan Auditorium, UNCW, 515 Wagoner Drive, Wilmington. For info: (910) 962-3500 or uncw.edu/arts/presents/2018-2019/alje.html.

Hail to the Chieftains

The Chieftains are an Irish cultural phenomenon. The six-time Grammy Award winners have successfully blended modern and traditional Irish music since 1962; among their historic performances: Pope John Paul II's visit to Ireland in 1979, where they played to an audience of over 1.3 million; the Great Wall of China, where they were the first Western musicians to perform; and the International Space Station, where two of their instruments travelled with NASA astronaut Cady Coleman. Don't miss an evening of Irish music that's out of this world. Friday, March 8. Tickets: $25-$75. Kenan Auditorium, UNCW, 515 Wagoner Drive, Wilmington. For info: (910) 362-7999 or cfcc.edu/capefearstage/.

Tee and Symphony

Ranked among America's top 100 golf courses by *Golf* magazine, the Eagle Point Golf Club is the scenic locale for the 22nd annual Wilmington Symphony Golf Classic on March 11. The event provides additional sources of financial support for the Wilmington Symphony — now in its 47th year — and the orchestra's youth education program. Round up a foursome at your office.

Sponsorship opportunities range from $150 for individuals to $3,999 for teams. Breakfast and registration, 7:30-8:30 a.m; shotgun start at 8:30 a.m. Eagle Point Golf Club, 8131 Bald Eagle Lane, Wilmington. For details and registration: wilmingtonsymphony.org/golf-classic.html.

Gone Fishing

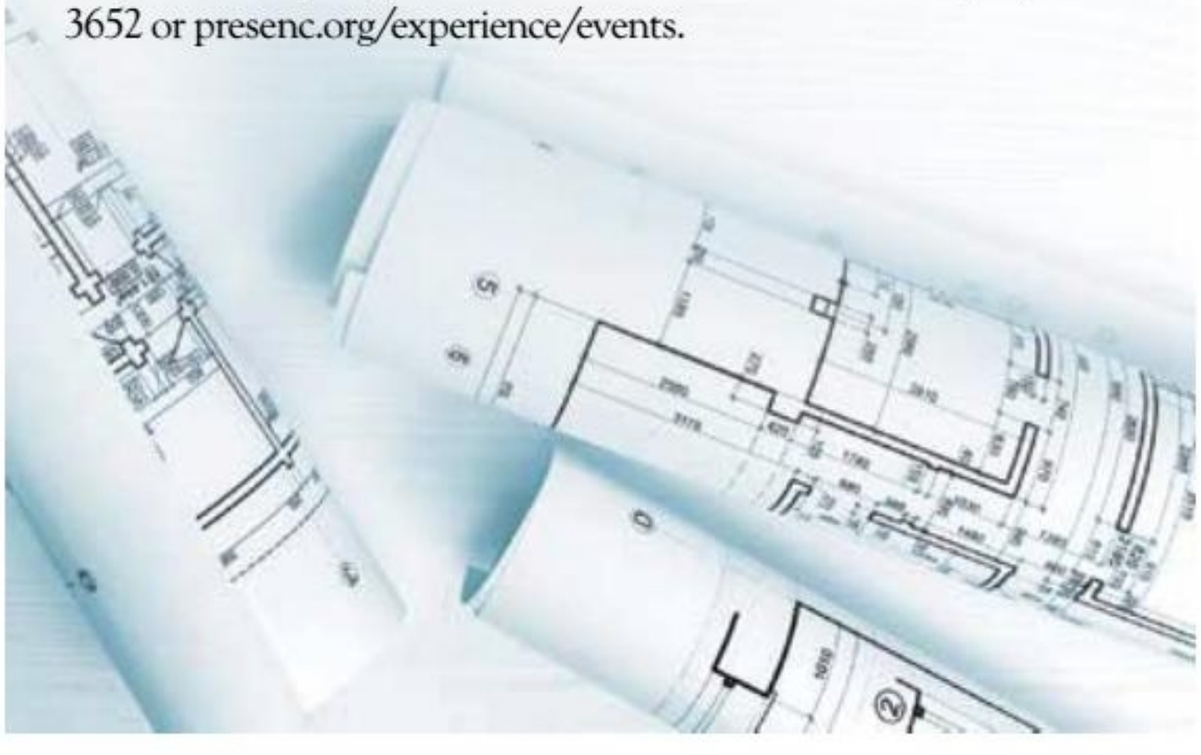
Striperfest is an annual two-day fundraiser for Cape Fear River Watch, held this year at the Coastal Convention Center. On March 29, come to a banquet and auction that includes vacation packages, boating equipment, restaurant packages — even works of art. March 30 will feature a catch-and-release judged striper tournament, which also functions as a study of migratory fish populations in the Cape Fear. There will also be boat rides and other family-friendly activities on tap. Proceeds from the event help in the restoration of the fisheries of the Cape Fear. March 29, 5:30 p.m.; March 30, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Coastline Convention Center, 503 Nutt St., Wilmington. For info: capefearriverwatch.org/news-events/striperfest.

Brunswick on Broadway

Thalian Association Community Theatre presents "The Best of Broadway at Brunswick," its first production at the Leland Cultural Arts Center. Come listen to local performers singing favorite songs from Tony Award-winning shows as well as a preview of upcoming productions. Directed by Elisa Eklof Smith with musical director Michael Lauricella, the event is hosted by Jeff Rivenbark and will raise funds to support TACT's theatrical productions. Tickets: $25. March 3, 3 p.m. Leland Cultural Arts Center, 1212 Magnolia Village Way, Leland. For info: (910)251-1788.

A Preservation Celebration

Founded in 1939, Preservation North Carolina is devoted to promoting and protecting the state's historic buildings and landscapes. On March 20-22, the organization will host its annual conference, which this year is being held in Wrightsville Beach. Join architects, historians (including Catherine Bishir) and preservationists for three days of lectures, seminars and tours of historic Wilmington architecture. The conference is open to anyone interested in old houses and preservation. Blockade Runner Beach Resort, 275 Waynick Blvd., Wrightsville Beach. For info and tickets: (919) 832-3652 or presenc.org/experience/events.



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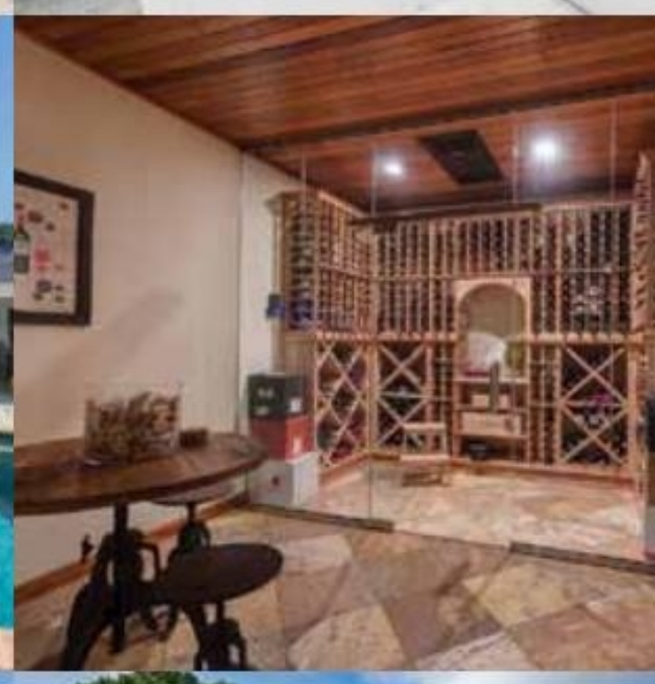
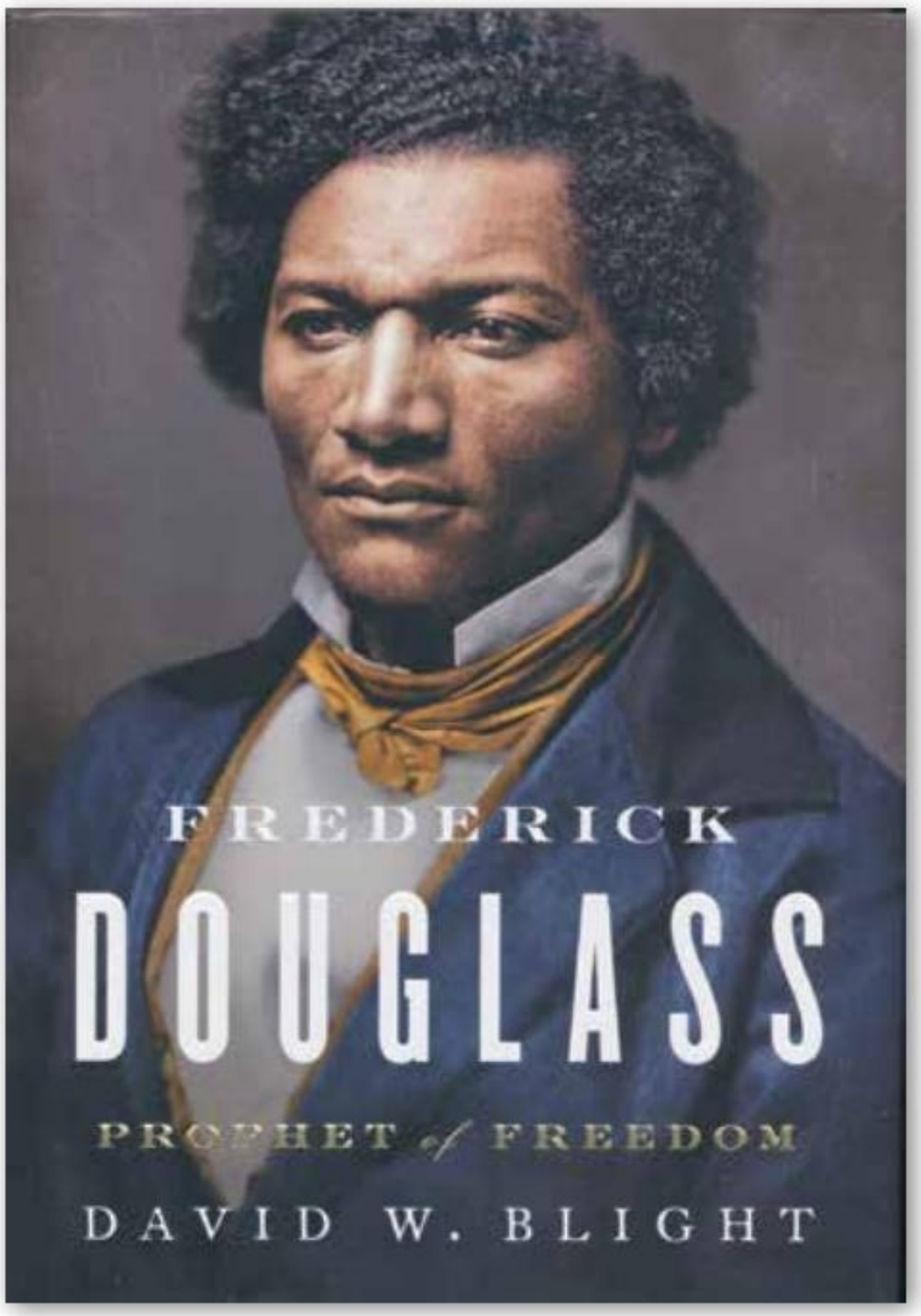


The Definitive Douglass

Revealing a multifaceted American icon



By Stephen E. Smith

Readers who've been inspired by Frederick Douglass' eloquent autobiographies will likely find David Blight's 900-page *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom* — touted by its publisher as "the definitive, dramatic biography of the most important African American of the nineteenth century" — a demanding read. The complexities of race relations in America make it so, and the fact that Frederick Douglass, our first nationally recognized black civil rights leader, is one of the most multifaceted and controversial Americans to have shaped 19th-century thought, only amplifies the challenge. But Blight's insights into Douglass' radical evolution and the obvious correlation with the state of race relations in contemporary America make this meticulously researched and beautifully written biography well worth the time and effort.

Douglass was born Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey around 1818 and lived his early years on the Delmarva Peninsula, a few miles from the small town where this reviewer was born and raised. At age 13, he was sent to Baltimore, where he was taught to read by his owner's wife, Lucretia Auld. He was eventually hired out to a "slaver breaker" in St. Michaels, a bayside village 10 miles west of my hometown of Easton, and after an attempted escape in 1836, he was briefly incarcerated in the Talbot County jail, an ominous stone structure adjacent to the courthouse I passed daily.

During my school years, I never once heard the name Frederick Douglass. There was no historical marker identifying the Sage of Anacostia as a local luminary (the only public monument in town, a bronze figure of a Confederate soldier cloaked in the stars and bars, was dedicated "To the Talbot Boys/1861-1865/C.S.A."). No school or municipal building was named for the great man, and he wasn't discussed in the Maryland history book we studied in the fifth grade. None of my childhood friends can recall any reference to Douglass. I was a college student before I learned of his extraordinary accom-

plishments and was compelled by curiosity to read his three autobiographies. Only then did it occur to me that growing up in Frederick Douglass' backyard without learning about him was tantamount to being raised in Springfield, Illinois, without hearing the name Abraham Lincoln.

I mention this lapse in my education, occurring about the time the Supreme Court ruled against segregation and Jim Crow laws, because it's an example of what Douglass struggled with all his adult life: the notion that a black man couldn't possibly demonstrate a profound philosophical wisdom and achieve worldwide fame. Perhaps the good citizens of Talbot County thought it best not to mention Douglass. Other than the accident of birth, they couldn't claim credit for his success. And who, after all, is a prophet in his own land?

Blight's biography adds little new information concerning Douglass' prewar years as a social reformer and abolitionist, other than to note that a self-reliant Frederick Bailey transformed himself by force of will into Frederick Douglass, one of the great thinkers of his time, a writer and public speaker whose talents were equal to those of Lincoln and whose determination to end the "peculiar institution" that was the economic lifeblood of the South surpassed that of the martyred president. "Douglass offered an original American to those who sought such images," Blight writes, "he was the sui generis former slave who found books, the boy beaten into a benumbed field hand who fought back and mastered language and wielded a King James – inspired prose at the world's oppressions with a genius to behold."

Douglass biographies are numerous and range in quality from Benjamin Quarles' excellent *Frederick Douglass* to Leigh Fought's *Women in the World of Frederick Douglass*, a misguided effort that occasionally borders on fiction. Blight's biography is exceptional because he had access to untapped primary sources contained in the collection of Walter Evans of Savannah. He's made good use of these sources to explicate Douglass' postwar struggles to secure the rights of freed slaves and to banish the scourge of lynching from the South.

Blight also thoroughly examines

Douglass' varied causes and obsessions. He backed John Brown's violent anti-slavery activities and was a staunch supporter of women's rights. He carried on a long-term relationship with Ottilie Assing, a German feminist, freethinker and abolitionist, who sheltered him when he was charged with conspiracy in connection with John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry. He served as minister to Haiti from 1889 to 1891 and was deeply involved with the 1893 Haitian pavilion at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago.

In 1884, Douglass married Helen Pitts, a white abolitionist from a prominent New York family, thus crossing the color line. All the while, Douglass continued to speak out against racial injustice, Jim Crow and peonage laws that in effect locked freedmen in a state of perpetual servitude. Late in his life, he was still railing on the effects of the pernicious color line: "(It) hurts us at midnight, it denies us accommodations in hotels and justice in the courts, excludes our children from schools, refuses our sons the right to learn trades and compels us to pursue only such labor that will bring the least reward." The South won that war of attrition.

Blight's biography is, for the moment, the definitive work on Frederick Douglass, although there is a need for a more insightful inquiry into the great orator's religious, political and philosophical beliefs. After 900 pages of text, Douglass remains something of an enigma, a man whose intelligence, eloquence and determination almost changed America for the better

On the courthouse lawn in my hometown of Easton, Maryland there are now two statues, one celebrating the "The Talbot Boys" and another bronze that depicts Douglass, one hand on a lectern, the other raised beseechingly skyward. The town celebrates their most famous son "throughout the year, including Frederick Douglass Day in September and the annual Juneteenth celebration of abolition." It's about time.

Stephen E. Smith is a retired professor and the author of seven books of poetry and prose. He's the recipient of the Poetry Northwest Young Poet's Prize, the Zoe Kincaid Brockman Prize for poetry and four North Carolina Press awards.

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The Art of Civil Discourse

A little healthy organic juicing with Rachel Lewis Hilburn

By Wiley Cash · Photographs by Mallory Cash

Last year I attended a literary event with some of the best known writers in the country, but as soon as the event began it became clear that the crowd was more interested in seeing emcee Rachel Lewis Hilburn, a woman whose disembodied voice had been speaking to them for years from the studios of WHQR Public Media. She joined the station in 2011, and she was named news director in 2012. A year later she anchored the pilot episode of *CoastLine*, a show that focuses primarily on local and statewide issues and the people they affect. Over the past six years, Rachel and her guests have discussed issues as diverse as gun control, water quality, film incentives and Thanksgiving recipes. No matter what the topic, Rachel always finds a fascinating angle. I will admit that I once sat in my driveway for 15 minutes and listened as Rachel and a county official discussed recycling. Like her voice, Rachel's questions are direct and smooth. Her interactions with people are civil and genuine, and she gives her guests an opportunity to tell their stories as well as the expectation that they will be held accountable for the stories they tell.

This is not to say that Rachel does not ask hard questions. I sat for a *CoastLine* interview when my last novel was released, and at one point Rachel read a quote from a terrible review I had received in a major newspaper. Then she asked, "How do you keep that dagger from staying inside you?" Ouch! No one had ever asked me how I recover from bad reviews, and that question forced me to be honest about the vulnerability of artists. I look back on that hour I spent on-air with Rachel as perhaps the best interview experience I have ever had.

I took an opportunity to ask Rachel a few questions of my own one chilly morning in late January. We met at Clean Juice in downtown Wilmington on the corner of Grace and North Front Street. I ordered the Immunity One, an organic blend of carrots, lemons, oranges, pineapples and turmeric. Rachel ordered the Glow One, a mix of organic apples, cucumbers, kale and spinach. We found seats by the huge windows that look out on Grace Street. While I serve on the board of directors at WHQR and have known Rachel for several years, there was one question I had never asked her.

"What was your path to public radio?"

"I started life thinking I would be an actor," Rachel said. "And I went to the North Carolina School of the Arts, and then I moved to New York and L.A. and did some theater."

"Acting?"

"Yes," she said. "At one point, when I was in L.A., I decided I wanted to have a steady income and see what other things I could do." She laughed and took a sip of her juice. "So I became a financial adviser, but only for about two years."

"How did you get to Wilmington?"

"I knew people in Wilmington, and I loved the East Coast," she said. "I was tired of the desert in Los Angeles, and I just loved the texture of the weather here. I came to Wilmington and embarked on a process of finding the next version of myself." During that process Rachel wrote and produced television news broadcasts for WWAY; she wrote and produced a documentary about the 1898 Wilmington race massacre; and she served as the executive director of the homeowners association at Bald Head Island.

When you stack all these jobs together — financial adviser, news writer, producer, documentarian and executive director of a homeowners association — it becomes clear that Rachel has been perfectly prepared for a career in public radio. Over the course of her diverse work history she has managed personalities, produced content, sought facts, and listened closely to people's concerns and this is exactly what she is doing with an exciting new serialized program called *CoastLine: Beneath the Surface*.

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DRINKING WITH WRITERS

According to the description on the program's website, the community members who will participate in *Beneath the Surface* are "thoughtful and engaged listeners who've agreed to be part of a yearlong conversation. They are black and white, youngish and older. Their politics cover the spectrum left, right and center."

In this politically charged environment, what happens when you put a group of diverse strangers in a room? Rachel has the answer: She assembled the group for a meet and greet a few days before their first on-air discussion.

"I thought I would have to do some goofy icebreaker," Rachel said. "But no icebreaker was needed. People freely went around the room introducing themselves. They seemed really enthusiastic about being there, and they didn't want to leave!"

Rachel said that, at least initially, conversations on *Beneath the Surface* will focus on local issues because she believes that is the place where people who are sitting together in the same room can achieve some level of civil discourse. Hopefully, that civility will trickle up.

"I happen to think the political dynamic, that super division and vitriol on Capitol Hill, and even at the state level, isn't going to change until regular folks change," Rachel said. "Public radio can pull back the curtain and introduce you to a situation in its context. It can introduce these whole human beings, and it makes it hard to put them in a box."

In keeping with Rachel's history of discussing timely topics and asking hard questions, the first topic broached on *Beneath the Surface* was the issue of Wilmington's Confederate monuments. I listened to the show, and I could hear the strain in people's voices, their discomfort in defending positions that may not be popular. But I could also hear other things: the click of boxes opening as people grew comfortable with one another; the sound of voices speaking calmly while sharing ideas and experiences. These were the sounds of whole human beings coming together and being civil.

Wiley Cash lives in Wilmington with his wife and their two daughters. His latest novel, The Last Ballad, *is available wherever books are sold.*

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MAGAZINE

Strings Attached

Adrian Varnam of Ronald Sachs Violins wants to place the perfect instrument in your hands

By Dana Sachs

Adrian Varnam

How long have you been in Wilmington?

I was born and raised here.

What were you doing before you opened this violin shop?

I owned a bar downtown, which is not conducive to a normal lifestyle. You're working late hours and standing up all the time, dealing with people not always at their best. It was time for a career change. I remember having a moment when I was behind the bar and thinking, "What am I contributing to society? What am I giving back? How am I making a difference?" I didn't feel fulfilled in that and this definitely is fulfilling.

What do you love about it?

I really enjoy putting instruments in young musicians' hands. I was that kid who started at age 5 with violin and did the whole thing, progressed through high school. That was a major part of my life, so it's nice to come back and see that journey from a different perspective.

What's it like in the shop on a typical afternoon?

We'll have a young person looking for strings, or a parent looking to start their kid in lessons. An adult looking for a new instrument to play, or a first instrument to play. A musician who needs a repair. We have the contract for New Hanover County Schools, so we do their rentals and repairs for the orchestras. We do the same thing for all of southeastern North Carolina and into neighboring counties of South Carolina. We have hundreds of instruments and we get new ones every year, because there's always an influx of new sixth-graders.

How much does a stringed instrument cost?

You can buy a really crappy violin on Amazon for $125 — factory-made in China — and it's going to be more trouble than it's worth. And then, up to six figures. I have violins here right now that are $5,000 to $10,000 each. At our shop in Atlanta, we've got many, many more, up to $15,000 or $20,000. Some, even $100,000.

And if someone decides to rent?

It's $19 a month for a violin, $23 for a viola, $40 for a cello, and $70 for a bass.

What if students' families can't afford to rent?

There are usually instruments at school, but unfortunately, these instruments were bought a long time ago and they've been used. Middle school kids are not the best stewards of stringed instruments, or any instrument. A lot of them are in bad shape and there's not tons of money to replace the fleet. But we have scholarship instruments, too, that we give away to programs. And we have a couple of people that sponsor students. They'll pay the monthly rental for a student to help support him or her.

Do you see a lot of talent here?

Oh, absolutely. We've got a really big program in New Hanover County. Every middle school has an orchestra and the four traditional high schools have orchestras. We've got a lot of private

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW SHERMAN

schools and private teachers, so it's not just the public schools. Cape Fear Community College. UNCW. We have great teachers here. I would say we are comparable to any county in the state in terms of talent.

How has the craft of making stringed instruments changed over the years?

It's a very intricate and specialized skill. There are fine makers that produce great instruments that sound just as good as ancient instruments. Of course, technology helps. It helps to make things a little better, but the actual design has not gotten better since Stradivarius perfected the instrument around 1700. Nothing's gotten better since then. String technology has changed. Bows — they're now making carbon-fiber bows. But the actual violin is still spruce and maple put together perfectly with the right glues and varnishes.

What makes a great violin?

A great violin projects. It's balanced. The high end is as good as the lower end. It's not tinny. It's not muffled. It has a very pure sound.

How do you react when you hear that kind of sound?

I've heard and played so many bad instruments over my career that when I've heard a decent one, I'm like, "Oh! That's *different*." Because I'm in the business, I'm looking for the problems. I'm playing an instrument going, "OK. What's *not* good about it?" And when I'm having a hard time picking out the bad things about an instrument, that means it's good, that it's appealing. And you can find a great instrument that sounds terrific for $500 to $1,000. It doesn't have to be a million dollar instrument.

Do you see a resurgence of interest in classical music?

What I see is a resurgence in interest in folk music and fiddle music. You go to Satellite Bar on a Sunday night and the old-time music is very popular. More and more young people are learning to fiddle along with classical, Irish fiddle music, traditional fiddle music and Bluegrass.

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So, young people aren't really drawn to classical music?

When I say "classical," I mean traditional ways of learning how to play an instrument. You have to learn the basics, and often that literature is classical music. But kids in middle school aren't just playing Mozart. They're playing pop music, and arrangements from movies and TV and video games. It keeps them interested. There is more of a disconnect with classical music now with [young people] than there used to be. You go to the symphony, and everyone's old. You don't see a lot of really fired-up 20-somethings at classical concerts, but you do see them at the Bluegrass jam.

Do fine instruments increase in value over time?

It's just like art. When the economy is in the toilet and people don't have extra money, they cut back on extravagant purchases. So the value of those instruments is dependent on the economy. But they certainly haven't depreciated. There are fine instruments, especially from the 1800s, that have a value of 20 to 50 thousand dollars. They're always going to be in that range.

Do people ask questions about their own violins?

Yes. We are stringed- instrument experts, and so every week I've got someone who's calling and saying, "I have this instrument. It was my mom's." Or, "It was my grandfather's. It was in the attic. Is it worth anything? Can I fix it? What should I do with it?" That's a service that we provide, too. There are so many instruments lying around that are family heirlooms or they bought it from a flea market. Those calls are plentiful.

So, what do I do with my violin from fourth grade?

You can certainly bring it in. We can talk about it.

Dana Sachs' latest novel, The Secret of the Nightingale Palace, *is available at bookstores, online and throughout Wilmington.*

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Changing Courses

Catherine Bishir has altered the narrative arc of North Carolina's cultural heritage – with unflinching facts and impeccable prose

PHOTOGRAPH BY ELIZABETH MATHESON

By J. Michael Welton

Architect Philip Johnson once challenged modernist orthodoxy when he famously told his students that they "cannot not know history." During her near 50-year career as an architectural historian, a fearless Catherine Bishir has used the same maxim to challenge North Carolina's prevailing cultural precepts. She's done it with well-researched, highly potent analyses of race, power and anthropology – and revealed it all through a finely tuned architectural lens. And she's done it with a highly readable writing style. "Her publications are second to none, and her effort is incredible," says Michelle Michael, senior planner of historic preservation for the town of Wake Forest. "She is the best – the premier architectural historian in the state at this point. All her books are great."

Bishir's start was a modest one. In 1971, armed with degrees in English from the University of Kentucky and Duke, she applied for a part-time job as an architectural survey assistant with the State of North Carolina. Congress had passed the National Historic Preservation Act in 1965, creating the National Register of Historic Places. So North Carolina's State Historic Preservation office was looking for someone with good writing skills and a working knowledge of architecture. Luckily, Bishir had studied art history in school. "They showed me the three orders of classical columns, and I knew what they were, so that was good," she says.

An offer ensued – but there was travel involved. With a young daughter at home, Bishir turned it down. "Then they called me and said they had an opening for an editor of National Register nominations with the North Carolina Office of Archives and History," she says. Bishir accepted. It would prove to be a fork in her professional road – a turn away from her family's legacy of teaching English, and into the burgeoning field of architectural history. It was also a step that would not only alter her career path, but eventually place North Carolina in a leadership role on the national stage.

It began quietly enough. "I was writing the National Register nominations and got to know the lingo and learned how to do new stuff," she says. "I probably did dozens – and after two years, I was promoted to head of the survey/planning branch." All the while, she shared her knowledge of language with others in the department.

"She was hired by H. G. Jones for the National Register to help people be more literate – to write better," says David Perry, former

editor-in-chief of the University of North Carolina Press. "As she became part of that process, she also developed the knowledge of what she was doing and writing about."

Later, she was out in the field on a regular basis, researching and documenting some of the most important properties in North Carolina. Eventually the traditionally held narrative about the social, cultural and architectural history of North Carolina would change — and she would play a major role.

From 1971 to 2001, Bishir served in a number of capacities in the Survey and Planning Branch of the Historic Preservation Office of the Division of Archives and History. There, she was mentored by some of the best in the profession. "Jack Zehmer taught me how to do the stuff, and Dr. Jones was also encouraging," she says. "Both saw that I was very interested and teachable — and they gave me that wonderful thing that people can give: the opportunity to expand your professional competence."

She taught at N.C. State — mentoring the next generation of architectural historians in classes about North Carolina architecture as well as vernacular architecture. It's a topic that's near and dear to her heart, as one of her first published articles, in a 1977 issue of the *North Carolina Historical Review*, indicated.

"There's her piece about the unpainted aristocracy of old Nags Head, built by S. J. Twine — they're the finest houses in North Carolina," says architect Frank Harmon. "It's about these buildings that are so well-crafted and attuned to their place on the coast that they should prove as a role model for how we build now."

That was followed by a pair of groundbreaking articles. First came her 1984 piece in the *Review* called "Black Builders in Antebellum North Carolina." It was a new look at an unexamined topic, one that revealed some of the social implications of what North Carolina's early buildings stood for. It was about relationships as much as it was about buildings.

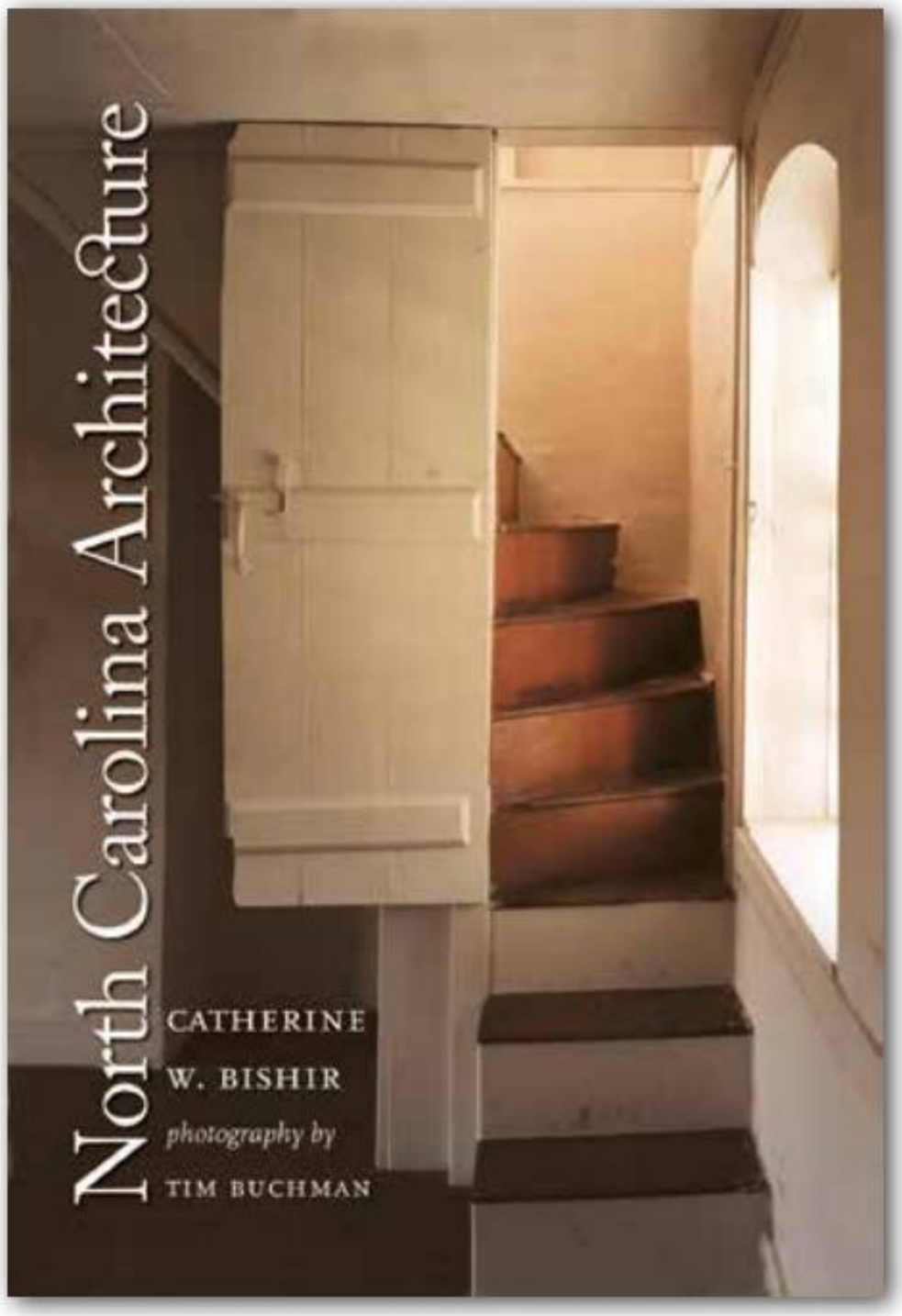
"It referenced the kind of tensions exhibited between white mechanics and slave laborers," says Jeff Crow, former deputy secretary of the North Carolina Office of Archives and History. "In Wilmington, the white mechanics vandalized buildings erected by slave laborers — they put them on notice that they didn't appreciate their skills and threatened their livelihood."

But the real earth-shaker came in 1993 with the publication of "Landmarks of Power: Building a Southern Past" in the premier edition of *Southern Cultures* by the Vernacular Architecture Forum. Bishir was a founding member and president of that organization, which had a strong influence on her life and work.

"She was one of the first to uncover the hypocrisy of the Confederate monuments," says Harmon about her article, which was a big step forward for both the author and her topic.

"It was important because it was about placing Civil War monuments within the context of political leaders of the time, and the idea of looking to the Confederacy as something to be honored with some admiration," says Robert Anthony, curator of the North Carolina Collection at the Wilson Special Collections Library at UNC-Chapel Hill.

The topic has proved enormously enduring and as relevant today — considering the recent toppling of Confederate statues in Durham and Chapel Hill — as when Bishir's article was published more than



two decades ago. "The monuments were there to proclaim white supremacy, while the ruling elite in charge would not give up power, even after Reconstruction," says Crow. "She had a particularly good eye for those kinds of things — she did intense research for them."

In the mid-1980s, Bishir served on AIA North Carolina's Historic Resources Committee with Myrick Howard, president of Preservation North Carolina. PNC had been founded in 1939 after the publication of *Early Homes and Gardens*, a book for the Garden Club of North Carolina. The organization's 50th anniversary was coming up in 1989, which wasn't lost on Howard or Bishir. "We thought: 'Wouldn't it be great to do a book?'" Howard says. "PNC raised $250,000 for Catherine's time, the photography and the book's publication."

With images by Charlotte photographer Tim Buchman, *North Carolina Architecture* was published in 1990 by UNC Press. It was an instant hit. "That book was a landmark for PNC — it's the go-to source for historic buildings in North Carolina," Howard says. "It raised a lot of interest in heritage, with educational materials, a TV show called 'Passion for Place' and three more videos."

North Carolina Architecture soon took on a life of its own, first favorably reviewed by *The New York Times Book Review*, then as a source for a statewide photographic show of Buchman's images that landed at the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C. "For 10 years, it had all kinds of spin-offs," Howard says.

Its oversize first edition was referred to as "The Big Book." It would stay in print in various formats — hardcover and paperback, large and small sizes — for about a quarter of a century, selling about 10,000 copies. It's definitive and encyclopedic, with an intellectual heft that's

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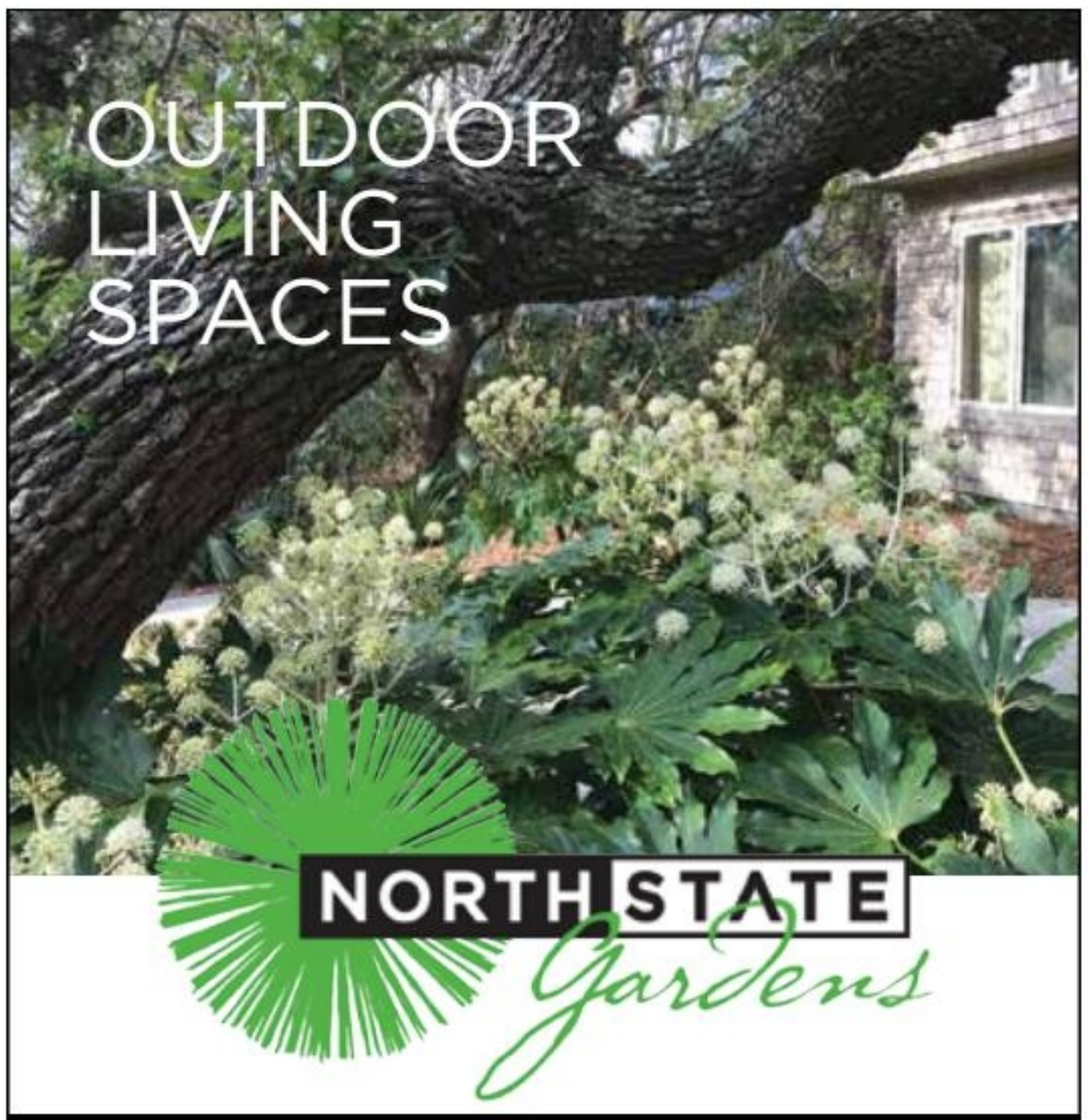

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uncommon in most popular architecture books today.

Typical of Bishir's work, the book is known not just for its architectural and monumental accomplishments, but also for its social dimensions. "There's an attention to detail not only in terms of traditional builders, but nuances for racial relations and the nature of family she became adept at getting that right," says James Clark, president of the North Caroliniana Society, which recently honored Bishir for her contributions to the state's architectural history. "She grew up in a family where that kind of milieu was important — she gave buildings the personality of people, and vice-versa."

For example, there's the concept of manipulative marketing in a post–Civil War railroad maintenance man's house — as sophisticated architecturally as the antebellum plantation homes that had fallen into disrepair. "It was an advertisement, and Catherine understood that," Clark says.

In essence, hers is a book that took advantage of the first 20 years of National Register work in North Carolina — with Bishir pulling it all together as a thoughtful tome on the state's built heritage, in just three years. "By the time that got started, I knew right much about North Carolina architecture," she says. "If I had started from scratch, I wouldn't have known how to do it."

North Carolina Architecture is a coffee-table book, to be sure. But unlike most, its cover isn't graced by the grandeur of the State Capitol in Raleigh, Biltmore House in Asheville or Tryon Palace in New Bern. Instead, it shows a simple staircase in an antebellum house. Its pages are not filled with landmark buildings, but with the far more common mills, churches, log homes, factories, farmhouses and tobacco barns. And for good reason: "If you only study and value the palaces here, you'll run our pretty soon," says Bishir.

Bishir would co-author a series of other books during the 1990s and early 2000s, including *Architects and Builders in North Carolina: A History of the Practice of Building* with Charlotte Brown, Carl Lounsbury and Ernest Wood in 1990. Then came a three-volume series of architecture guidebooks with Michael Southern — *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Eastern North Carolina* in 1996; *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina* in 1999, with Jennifer Martin; and *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Piedmont North Carolina* in 2003. These guidebooks are indispensable for the architectural historians trained by Bishir, like Michelle Michael in Wake Forest. "I've got multiple copies, because I've worn them out," she says.

But it's Bishir's more recent, follow-up book on black workers — *Crafting Lives: African American Artisans in New Bern, North Carolina, 1790-1900* — from 2013 that Michael treasures just as much. "It's immeasurably valuable — it sheds light on African-American life that's really important," she says. Funded by Tryon Palace and also published by UNC Press, *Crafting Lives* is evidence-based rather than stereotypical, and documents the lives of masons, cobblers, blacksmiths, dress makers and seamstresses, many of whom could read and write, even as slaves.

"What I like is that people in New Bern like it, black and white," Bishir says. "It got good reviews and it feels good to find that the community will learn about the lives of people who seldom appear in history books."

After retiring from the State Historic Preservation office, Bishir worked at PNC as a senior architectural historian from 2002 to 2008.

Today, she's gone digital at N.C. State, as curator in its architectural collections in the special collections research center. There, she's hard at work on an online collection called *North Carolina Architects and Builders: A Biographical Dictionary.*

"It's been a completely serendipitous experience — I'd started working on a book about it and after a little while I complained to my husband about it," she says. "He suggested I do it on the web somehow, and I talked to the folks at the library and it evolved that they wanted an experimental digital publication. Susan Nutter was director of the library and gave me the job of doing it. It includes builders and architects from the late 1700s up to the modern day."

"It's a terrific resource — every time I turn around, she's adding more," PNC's Howard says. "She's still the motivating force behind it."

If Bishir's published books and journal articles are any indication, surely her online architectural entries are composed of well-written sentences that yield meaningful short stories. You'd expect no less from someone who hails from a literary family, relishes the English language, and isn't afraid to alter the narrative arc of history.

Catherine Bishir will be a featured speaker at Preservation North Carolina's annual conference in Wrightsville Beach on March 21. For more information: presnc.org/experience/events.

J. Michael Welton writes about architecture, art and design for national and international publications, and edits a digital design magazine at www.architectsandartisans.com. He is the architecture critic for the News & Observer *in Raleigh and author of* Drawing from Practice: Architects and the Meaning of Freehand *(Routledge: 2015). He can be reached at mike@architectsandartisans.com.*

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Goodbye, Norma Jean

Going whole hog in Lumberton

By Bill Thompson

In the course of an otherwise normal conversation, a lady asked me how I come up with the "weird" stuff I write about. I told her I honestly didn't know. Upon reflection and adequate time to come up with a better answer, I still don't know.

The question did cause me to look back at some of the topics I have written about during the last 50 years — off and on.

Several topics had to do with farm animals. I don't find that unusual in this part of the country, which is still, primarily, rural despite the subtle encroachment — and exit — of industry. Most of the folks I know are only one or two generations removed from the farm. For years the mule was my most frequent farm animal topic, but now said animal is becoming less than conspicuous in North Carolina. One reason I give mules so much attention is because I hope they might make a comeback. I don't believe this is an unlikely possibility. If you remember, Republicans were almost extinct in North Carolina once. Now look at 'em.

I guess it is appropriate, what with all the controversy lately, that my most interesting farm animal story was about a pig. She was 600 pounds of grace and charm. Her red hair was perfectly coiffed, rhinestone earrings and matching tiara graced her head, and the pink tutu was perfect for the evening.

And what an evening!

Never in the annals of polite Southern society has there been such a party. The Four Hundred (actually about 360) of Lumberton, North Carolina, turned out on a Saturday night in 1982 to honor the young lady who was to "officially" become one of their own.

In reality, despite her lofty intentions, Norma Jean (named after Marilyn Monroe) would always be a little different. After all, she was a pig, not an ordinary pig to be sure, but nonetheless, a pig. There is some question as to whether she knew she was a pig, since she had never lived in a pigpen or eaten pig food. She had instead eaten lobster and champagne and lounged on the sofa in the den of her "parents," Dr. and Mrs. Raymond Sattler.

I am sure that in her wildest dreams (and be assured that Norma Jean did dream) she never could have conjured up a scene to match her "debut" on that Saturday night.

As an emcee, I have presided over all kinds of events and ceremonies. I have always prided myself on my ability to handle any situation. But I had a problem at Norma Jean's party. I have ad-libbed entire programs, ignored drunks and hecklers, held back elated parents and friends as they rushed a stage after the announcement of a pageant winner, calmed crowds of fans eager to touch a visiting Hollywood or television star. All that was nothing compared with the rush to see Norma Jean as she entered the ballroom of the Ramada Inn in Lumberton.

Chaos! A brass band played a fanfare written especially for the occasion. Klieg lights flooded the sky and the red carpet was rolled out. As she entered to the strains of the music, television cameras and hundreds of personal cameras focused on her. She left immediately. (No amount of experience or training can prepare you to chase a pig through a hotel lobby and down hallways.)

Norma Jean did return, however, and after receiving a chocolate key to the city from the mayor, stayed to receive friends as she lay on the dais constructed for her that evening.

During the course of the evening, the band played and the guests dressed in their formal attire after having their photos taken with Norma Jean. Lights bounced off the sparkling ice sculpture of Norma Jean's likeness. Dr. and Mrs. Sattler, acting as spokespersons for Norma Jean, held interviews with the press, including a gentleman from *The Wall Street Journal* and another from *People* magazine.

As her guest mingled, drank champagne and tasted the delicious shrimp, roast beef, chocolate strawberries, (no pork, of course), someone asked the question, "What could be next for Norma Jean?"

Well, since I was working at a local television station in Wilmington at the time, I did a sequel to her debut by following Norma Jean as she vacationed at the beach, complete with scenes of her frolicking in the surf and sunbathing on the dunes. It caught the interest of the network folks at NBC and they ran the piece on the *Today* show.

I don't know what happened to Norma Jean. I'm sure that despite all efforts to acquire immortality, she passed on to hog heaven. But I'm fairly sure that her arrival there did not receive a welcome to compare with the one she had in Lumberton.

Bill Thompson is a regular Salt *contributor. His newest novel,* Chasing Jubal, *is available wherever books are sold.*

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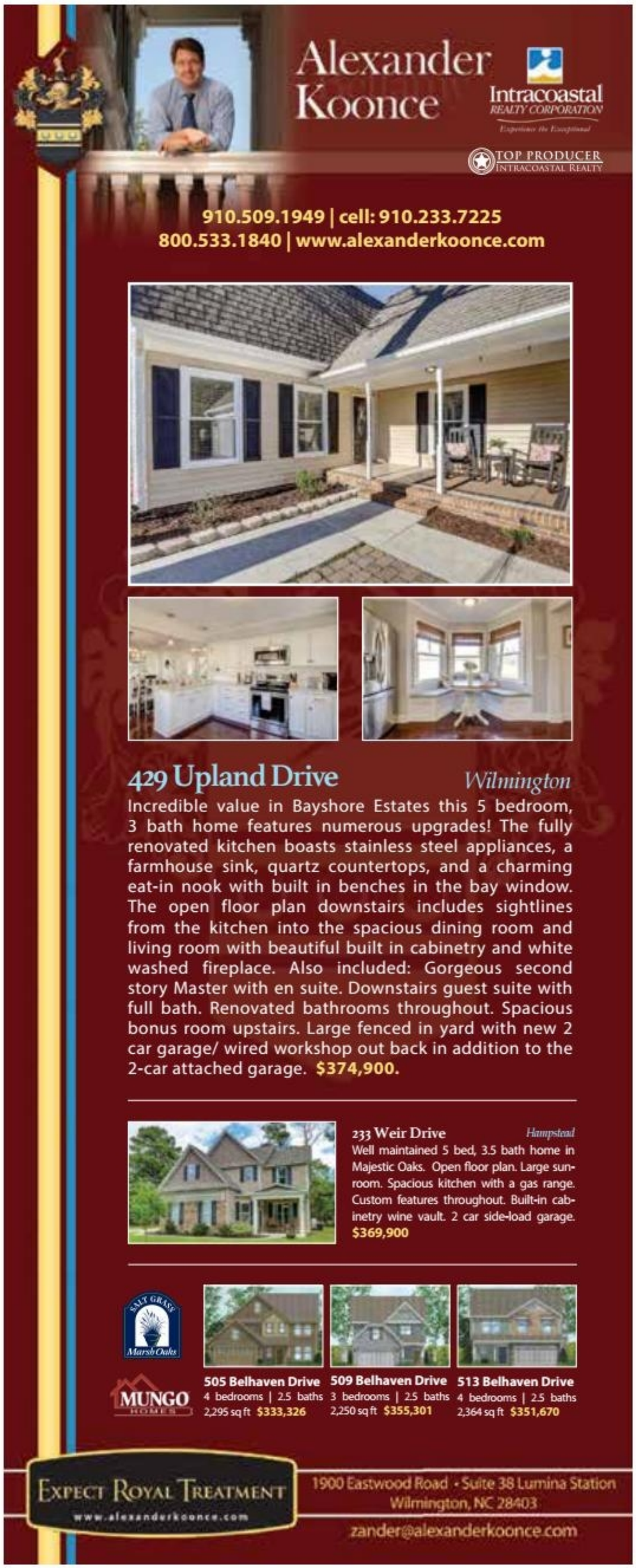
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M.I.A.: Mom

Why Whistler's mother is looking for a permanent home

By Nan Graham

Have you seen this woman?

If missing person's milk cartons make a comeback, you might see the above image on your kitchen counter . . .

Missing: Elderly woman, reportedly age 65 years at the time of her last portrait. Last seen in the 20th century. Authorities believe she is still among the living . . . though her whereabouts are unknown. Native of Wilmington, North Carolina. Last seen wearing floor-length black dress, dated white lace cap and a Puritanical expression on her face. Small in stature and not prone to frivolous behavior. Last seen in Latimer House archive room where she hung out for some time. Name: Anna McNeill Whistler. Son, renowned Bohemian artist James Whistler, painted the iconic original profile portrait of his mother seated in a modest rocking chair.

It's true. She seems to have disappeared without a trace. This copy of a copy of the original portrait *Whistler's Mother*, commissioned by the City of Wilmington, was hung in City Hall. Twice the poor woman was banished to the Thalian Hall attic. As late as 2003, she was at the Latimer House, who returned it to the City of Wilmington. But the 5 1/2-by-4 1/2-foot oil painting has moved around almost as much as its real-life model (subject), Anna Mathilde O'Neill Whistler.

Born in 1804 to Scotsman Dr. Daniel McNeill and wife

Martha Kingsley, Anna spent her early girlhood in Wilmington, North Carolina, before she moved to New England and married a West Point friend of her brother, widower George Whistler. Anna became the stepmother of two young children and added four more to the brood, moved to Saint Petersburg with her young family while George designed the important railroad that linked Saint Petersburg and Moscow. He even designed the steam whistle to replace the trumpet as a signal of the approaching engine. The family lived a lavish lifestyle in Russia, hobnobbing with the elite of the city. Mama herself sailed across the Atlantic 11 times during her lifetime; dined with the czar, Queen Victoria, even Victor Hugo. The Whistlers had lost two sons before father George died of cholera, leaving his 45-year-old widow with teenager James and other siblings in Russia. Anna returned to America. When rebellious James flunked out of West Point, he worked as a draftsman and then became an artist in Paris.

James lived with several mistresses through the years. Moving to London, "Jimmie," as his mother called him, lived with his beautiful mistress Joanna for eight years before Mama wrote that she had arrived in Southampton 80 miles down the road from his London flat and told Whistler that she was coming for a visit. ETA: two days. Jimmie hustled Jo into nearby digs down the street before Mama arrived for her visit. It was said that Anna chose the top floor of his flat so she could be closer to her maker. She stayed for nine years while Whistler rose to fame in the art world. Tabloids reported his antics along with his coterie of like-minded artists who proposed the "Art for Art's sake." He and Oscar Wilde exchanged witticisms and barbs and became the scandalous talk of London.

His *Arrangement in Grey and Black No.1* — the painting known by all as *Whistler's Mother* — is listed in the 10 most famous portraits in the world, along with the *Mona Lisa*. In addition to appearing on a 1934 postage stamp, her image has been widely parodied by *The New Yorker* as well as *Mad* magazine, and international publications. Despite the barbs, *Whistler's Mother* has become the icon of American motherhood. The original painting has been shuffled from the Luxembourg Museum to the Louvre to its final home at the Musee d'Orsay.

Our own poor Anna McNeill Whistler, abused, ridiculed and abandoned, deserves the city's respect and a permanent home in City Hall. She belongs to us. She's iconic. She is out there somewhere. Please email ngraham@ec.rr.com if you have any information about this painting.

Nan Graham is a regular Salt *contributor and has been a local NPR commentator since 1995.*

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Many Wilmingtons

The hidden jewel that has finally been found

"Wilmington is a big word," one local business owner and lifelong resident told me recently. Why, yes it is, thought I, Lord Wilmington, the very man whose name graces this beautiful and curious coastal city. "It has three parts," she added. "Old white Wilmington, old black Wilmington, and all the people who have moved here." The latter, I have learned, are arriving at the rate of four or more per day, mostly from the Northeastern realms. It's an invasion not seen since the Civil War as the aesthetics of this sweet spot — climate, coast, culture and cost — have become more widely known to those weary of the cold, high-tax bustle of their home states and the expensive density (and mosquitoes) of previous escape destinations such as Charleston and Savannah.

But there are more Wilmingtons than those quite distinctive three my friend mentioned, I have learned during my constant and fabulously revealing wanderings of this town, first and most ably governed by my protege Gabriel Johnston, who learned at my silken knee when I was speaker of Britain's new House of Commons in the early 1700s. (By the way, my new passions for surfing, motorcycling and fishing have been joined by shuffleboard at the Barbary Coast — thanks to my delicate and well-manicured touch — and pool shooting at the Duck & Dive, where I have been coached by local landowner Charles Alexander, who learned how to "hustle" while growing up in a pool hall owned by a one-armed gambler.)

There is, of course, the daylight downtown and the after-midnight one, in which inebriates topple the city's IQ and rekindle its long-held reputation as a wharf town of questionable virtue. There's inner Wilmington and the outer one, where the city annexed vast farmlands to make way for the college and its professors and developers, thereby giving us our eastern halo of malls, subdivisions and tangled roadways. There's the south end of downtown and its scrappy warehouse developments, music, its lake, venerable Sunset Park, its port, River Road and lots of land ripe for development. Now there's even a northern downtown of new apartments, condos and fresh residents where an old sawmill once stood, growing more distinctive from the old port core. And there are the satellite Wilmington towns of Castle Hayne and Leland and the rapidly growing sprawl of subdivisions in Pender, Brunswick and New Hanover counties, practically within sight of the city and certainly within its planning footprint. Roughly 50,000 people a day come here from these other areas to shop, work, go to school or to the hospital. Double that in the summer. And that's going to quickly double again as the rest of the nation gets a taste of our easy salt life.

"It's wild," Mayor Bill Saffo told me. "We've been a hidden jewel for many years. Now, they've really found us." So how can these disparate Wilmingtons — nearly all of them rapidly growing — work together for a healthy present and future?

Sorting out these kinds of tangles in our vast realm is how I became a favorite of Kings George I and II; why I was accepted by both the Whigs and Tories (the liberals and conservatives), even though I was widely considered to be lax, ponderous, and overly rouged.

"We've got a really exciting time right now," Ed Wolverton told me when I went to his Front Street office to talk vision for our city. He's

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK STEELMAN

the president of Downtown Wilmington Inc., a nonprofit steering and planning group guided by 38 board members made up of residents, business owners, college representatives and other stakeholders, including, of course, developers. (I wasn't here long before I heard of the mighty reach of local development families like the Camerons, Trasks and Kenans. Thus is how it's ever been for the landed gentry.) Wolverton, clad in a crisp lavender shirt, matching paisley tie and midnight black slacks, opened his books for my skilled perusal. We reviewed the city's previous two-decade master plan — Wilmington Vision 2020 — and I was surprised to see how many goals were met, including the Convention Center, new hotels, business and housing complexes, the Riverwalk expansion and public transport. There was even the addition of a new and quite successful 7-acre marina dredged out of a north-center-city shoulder of the mighty Cape Fear.

Wolverton, the kind of planner and problem-solver I used to send to our many colonies during my upsetting time as prime minister, has been here five years after similar stints in Greensboro, Wichita and Savannah. "We're in a fortunate situation," he told me as he laid out the addition of roughly 1,000 new downtown dwellings in developments like Sawmill Point, River Place, City Block, Pier 33 and Flats on Front, most of them with parking built in. (Parking, of course, is the city's Achilles heel. It's why my Queen Street landlord loaned me one of his Harley-Davidson motorcycles.) The idea is to mate new downtown residential and business development with the old historic riverfront core as the entire area expands and many more people look to downtown Wilmington as a destination. That will make this a four-season, 24-hour town.

So why does the downtown riverfront seem to have fewer visitors now? Why are there more vacant storefronts and more vagrants on the benches? Why is downtown so dirty? My mother, Mary Noel — the best-dressed woman in England — would not tolerate it. And why has riverfront Wilmington not bounced back from Hurricane Florence more quickly?

Part of it is public relations, Wolverton said. National news depicted Wilmington as devastated, a perception they've worked to correct. The storm took out the Salvation Army's downtown shelter, leaving more people on the street. And Wilmington's rebuilding process has been hindered by the historic and multi-floored nature of its buildings, Wolverton explained. Different floors can be owned or leased by different people or businesses. One on the ground floor, like Waffle House, might be ready and anxious to repair and reopen but couldn't until those above took care of their problems. "Who owns the roof?" becomes a crucial question.

And there are hidden structural and even personal issues. For example, Farmin' on Front, downtown's healthy grocery, not only suffered storm damage but also the death of a prominent family member. More than a few businesses that were just starting to enjoy the steady new growth got punched right back into survival mode by Florence.

But there seems to be a strong confidence in the future — and in city leadership — among those business owners I've visited since the storm. "Absolutely," said Bobby Hamelburg, the fourth-generation owner of Finkelstein's Music at Front and Market, where I buy strings for my

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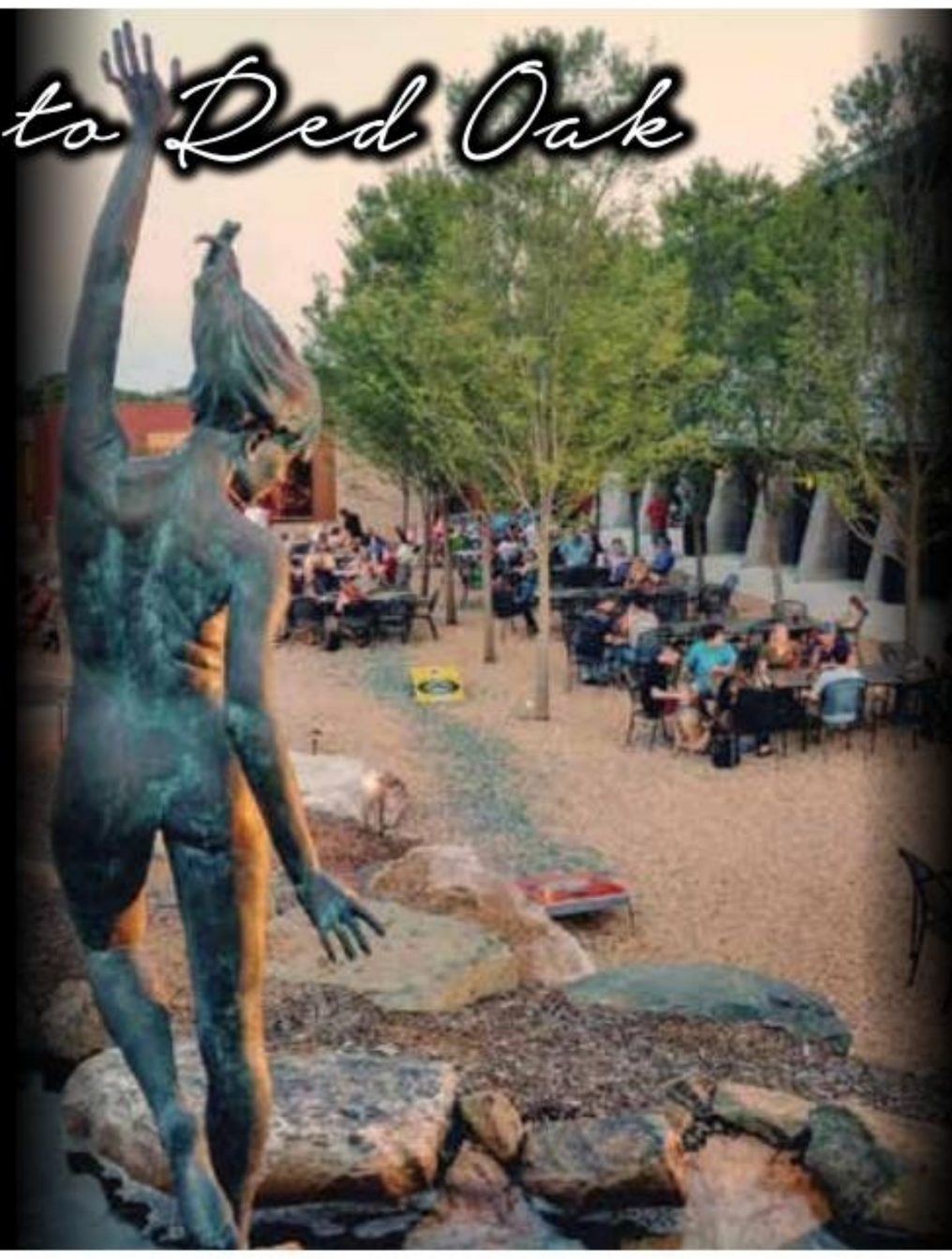


MARCH HAPPENINGS

MARCH 5
MARDI GRAS/
FAT TUESDAY FUN

MARCH 17
ST. PATRICK'S DAY
CELEBRATION

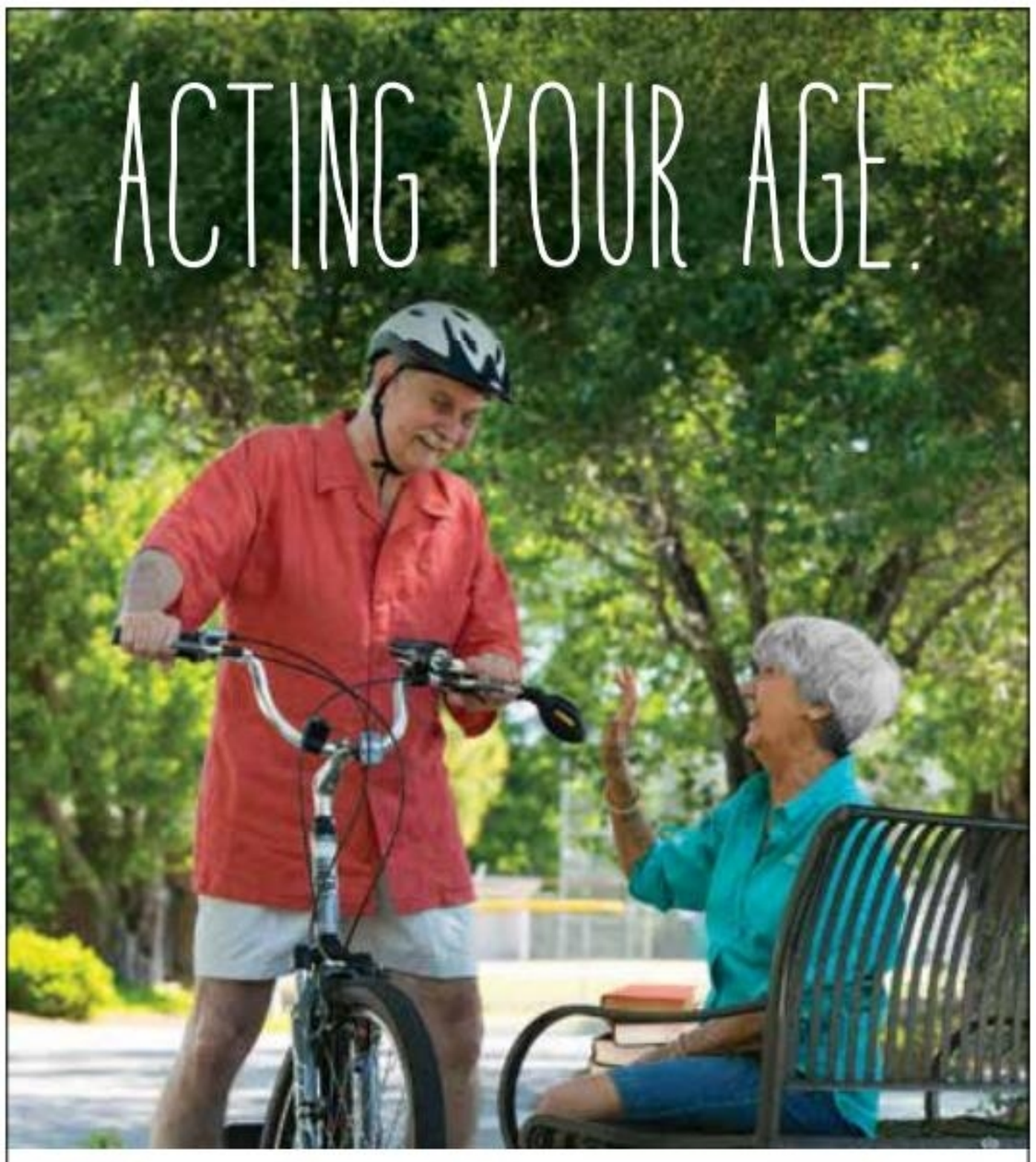
WEDNESDAY NIGHTS
MUSIC BINGO AT 7PM

THURSDAY NIGHTS
TRIVIA AT 7PM

FRIDAYS
BREWERY TOUR AT 4:30PM

WEDNESDAY - SUNDAY
VARIOUS FOOD
TRUCKS ON SITE

LAGER HAUS HOURS
WED. - FRI. 4 - 10PM
SATURDAY 1 - 10PM
SUNDAY 1 - 7PM



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lute. He's not a guy to mince words. And given that they've been on that corner for 113 years, it's rather strong when he says the outlook and governance is the "best ever."

Friends, despite my reputation for frippery, I'm quite serious about the business of the realm. I've seen healthy colonies suffer or fail due to lack of vision and follow-through. I want to know the details of how my namesake city will cling to its small-town charm while dealing with all its new regional-city pressures. "It's a challenge," Mayor Bill Saffo told me as we went over his views for the future and how they'll be funded and accomplished. As the entire area rapidly grows, "How do we keep the quality of life?" he asked. "How do we keep from wrecking the place?"

Saffo, a real estate man, grew up here. He's been mayor since 2006 — the longest tenure in city history. He knows where Wilmington has been. And it seems he knows where it's going. We talked new roads and interchanges — traffic is another obvious Achilles heel — parking, port expansion, tree canopies, the new festival park, funding streams, public-private partnerships and budget responses to public desires, such as how your neighborhood looks. Both Saffo and Wolverton said they're very conscious of the importance of preserving and enhancing the flavor, feel and beauty of the city — the feng shui of it. "We have a lot of work ahead of us," Saffo said.

Yes, lots of work, big and small. As my mother used to say, it's the little things that tell the difference between ugliness and beauty. Wash that dirty fire hydrant or street sign on your block. Keep your yard and sidewalk tidy. Join your fellow gardeners and artists to add beauty and character to the city. And stay on Wolverton, Saffo and City Council to keep this city in tune with itself.

It's no coincidence that I, Spencer Compton, Earl of Wilmington, have come to my namesake city at this crucial fork in the road. You may email me at spencercomptonrides@gmail.com or approach me on our fair streets. I'm the 6-foot-9-inch (without heels) one wearing longish hair and only a hint of powder on my newly tanned face.

Yes, Wilmington is a big word. But it's really just spelled us. — *Spencer Compton*

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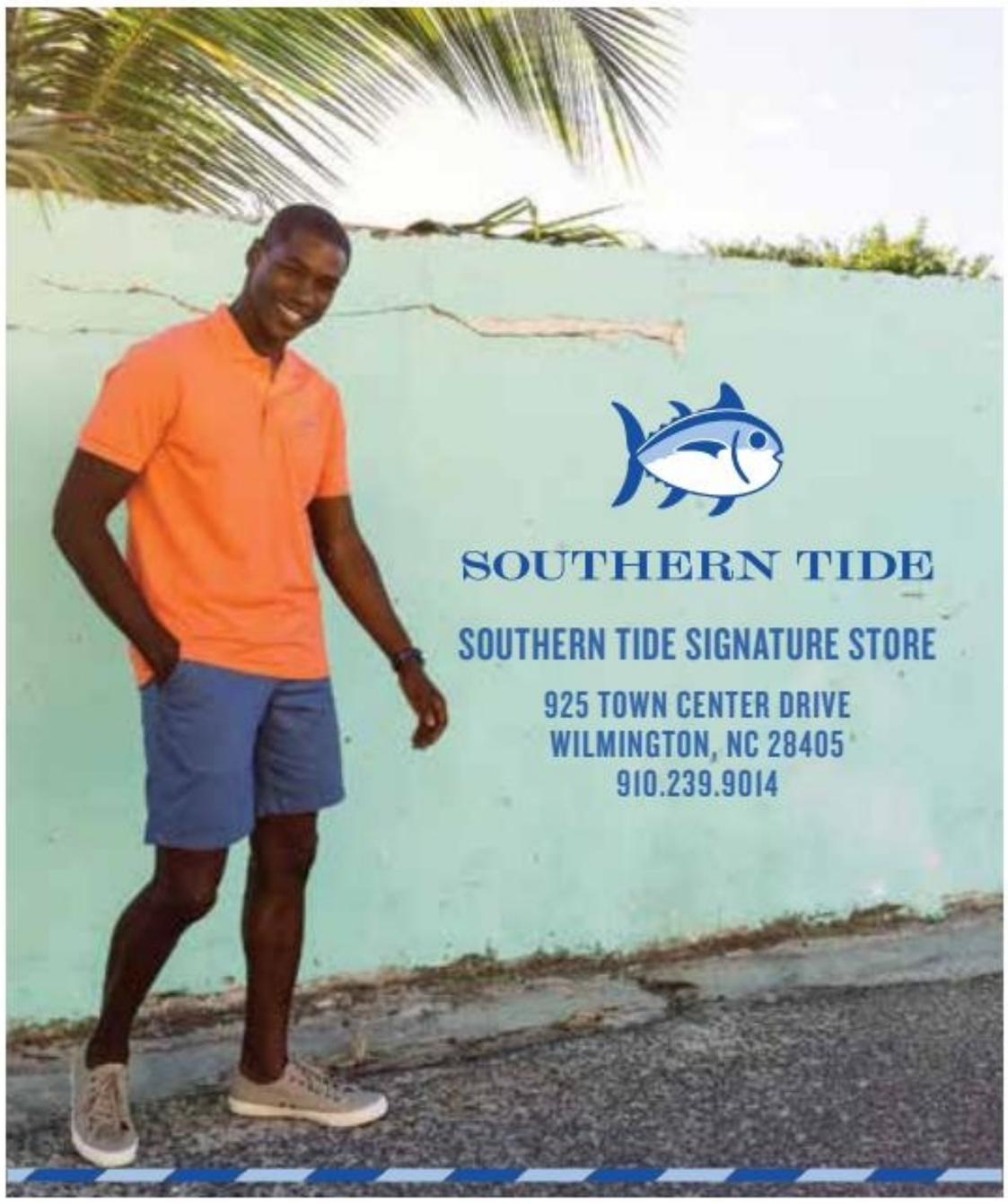

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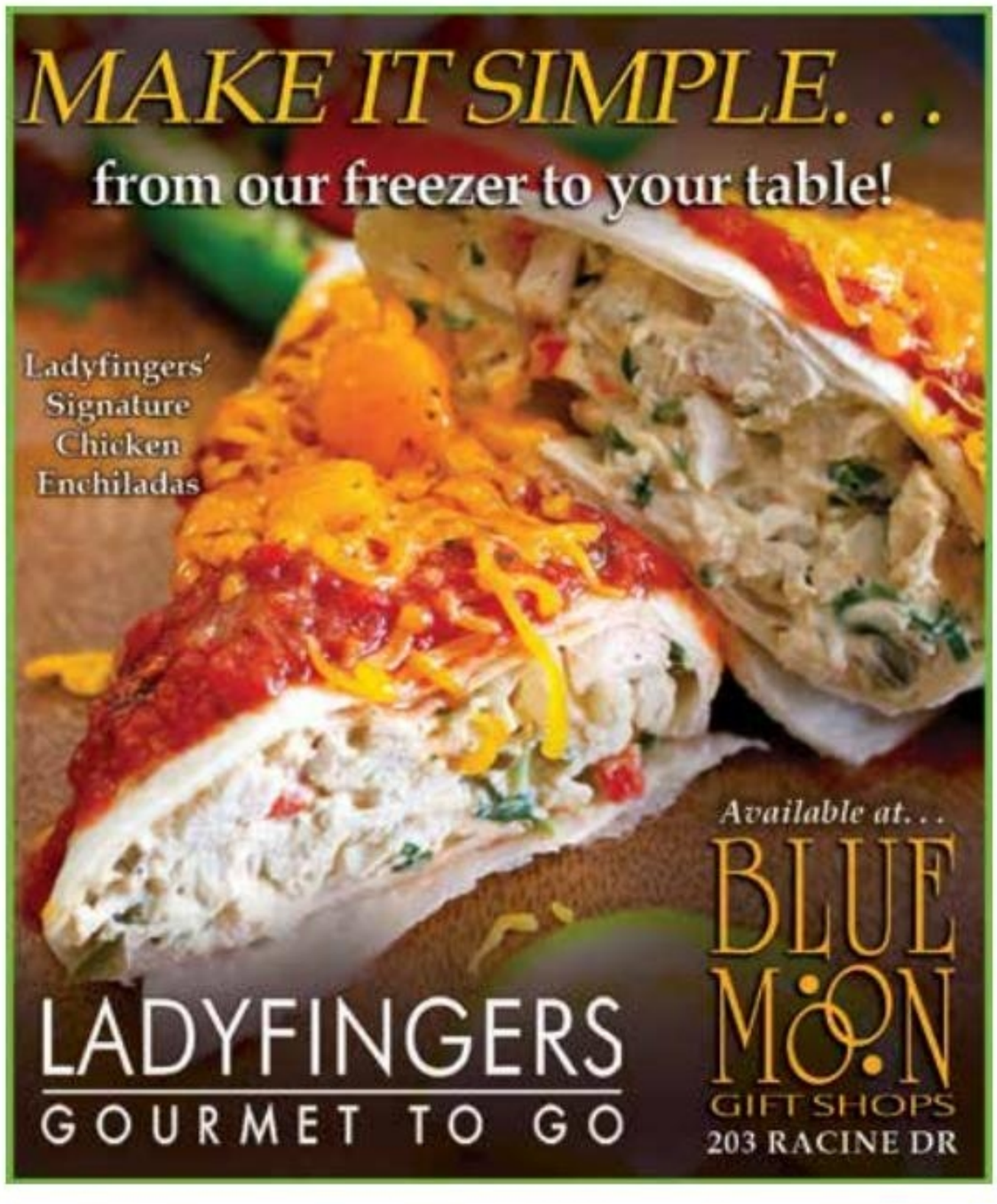

Bald Eagle

Proudly returned and flying high

By Susan Campbell

Anyone who has had the good fortune to spot a bald eagle — whether soaring overhead or perched along a waterway — cannot help but be awed by their handsome appearance. This large raptor is not only our national symbol, but the only eagle found solely in North America. Benjamin Franklin lobbied hard for the wild turkey, the only endemic bird species to the United States. But Congress decided on the bald eagle in 1782, as a result of its perceived fierce demeanor. In actuality, bald eagles are very opportunistic and not the active hunters most people believe them to be.

During the first half of the 20th century, eagles were erroneously persecuted by raptor hunters, often by ranchers who were attempting to protect their investments. They were also affected by metal toxicity as a result of feeding on game containing lead shot. Additionally, during the period of broad-scale DDT application, the toxin accumulated in carnivores at the top of the food chain. And, as was the case in several bird species, it caused eggshell thinning so severe that eagle eggs broke long before they could hatch.

Bald eagles were declared an endangered species in 1967. Following the ban on DDT and the passage of the Endangered Species Act in 1973, their numbers began to rebound. On June 28, 2007, the species was declared recovered. Here in North Carolina, bald eagles are being closely monitored by state biologists. Although the number of nests and young has been increasing, they are still considered threatened here.

Along our coast, sightings are numerous, especially during the cooler months. Birds can even be spotted from the beach but are more likely to forage over the sounds. It is rather shocking to see these big birds hunting for injured or weakened waterfowl. Flocks of ducks as well as shorebirds will flush if an eagle gets too close. And bald eagles are more than capable of grabbing a duck from the water even if it dives to escape. They also may steal a meal from a gull. However, they are also notoriously lazy, tending to be attracted to feed on dead fish or even roadkill. Sadly, they are just not the proud birds they seem to be.

It is midwinter when birdwatchers and endangered species biologists are on the lookout for eagle's nests. Bald eagle pairs return to their breeding territories and lay eggs ahead of most other raptors (the exception being great horned owls that begin breeding activities a bit earlier). Their sizable platforms of dead branches and large sticks may or may not be easy to spot. Eagle's nests, if they are reused from year to year, will be gradually enlarged, not massive affairs. But newer nests can be well concealed in the top of a live evergreen or large snag. Few pairs have been found in the lower coastal plain, but they certainly could be there given the vast and undeveloped habitat there is in the area.

Eagle young, who typically fledge in April, take three to four years to mature. They will not successfully attract a mate until they have a fully white head and tail. Should you see an adult from early in the New Year onward, keep an eye out for a second bird. A pair of adults may mean there is a nest somewhere nearby. If you suspect that you have found a nest, definitely give me a holler!

Susan would love to receive your wildlife sightings and photos. She can be contacted at susan@ncaves.com.

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Tilt Toward Spring

Night's frozen mantle sparks
in early morning rays, luminous
as a bride's new diamonds.

Tree's crystalline coatings
slip soundlessly from drooping
branches, twinkling fairy lights
pirouetting to the ground.

Ice sheets slide from the eaves
dropping iridescence on unsuspecting
tender daffodils waking from winter
slumber.

Air comes alive with birdsong
and fluttering wings.

Lawn strewn with early robins,
pecking for sustenance, puffing
their breasts for warmth.

Signaling Earth's inevitable tilt
toward spring.

– Patricia Bergan Coe

The Gospel According to Ashley

A heaven-sent one-man show

By Gwenyfar Rohler · Photograph by Mark Steelman

Describing Ashley Strand in print as "a force of nature" is so overdone. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that if you combined Dick Shawn's talent, Daniel Craig's sex appeal and Gore Vidal's intellect, then stirred well, seasoned with Liberace's flair and brought to the table *enflambé* — you would come close to the Ashley Strand experience live on stage. In other words, he is a vivacious blend of intellect, professional craft and primal energy that is hard to contain and impossible to ignore.

Wilmington audiences were first introduced to Strand through Alchemical Theatre Company's 2016 production of William Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, which was set in contemporary North Carolina. He came as a visiting artist to play Pompey Bum, the tapster turned executioner's assistant, and two years later bought a house here. This past year he and Christopher Marino, producing artistic director of Alchemical Theatre Company, began developing a one-man show of the Gospel of Mark from the King James Version of the Bible. From visiting artist to homeowner is a bit of leap: "One of the things people [the other actors] kept asking me this spring when I was doing fundraisers for Alchemical was . . . 'So you moved here to do one show a year?'" But Strand is adamant. "I have been looking for an artistic home for a quarter of a century." In Wilmington, he has found it.

"When I got the opportunity to work with a world-class Shakespeare director I said, 'If he wants to keep hiring me I'm going to do whatever it takes to make sure that happens,'" says Strand. "So I'm going to move there. If nothing else happens but I get to do one show a year with him for the next 20 years. That will be 20 more first-rate Shakespeare experiences than I have had in the last 20 years." For Strand, who received his M.F.A. from the Academy of Classical Acting in Washington, D.C., that is not a flippant statement. "I came here with a crazy dream that I think will come true: that Chris Marino will someday be the artistic director of a major regional, destination Shakespeare theater. It will be a great artistic resource for many, many people. I believe that's going to happen." From the outside, at least, there are a few pieces that go into most of the pies that Marino makes. For example, Shakespeare and classical texts interest him — not as relics but as current, vibrant, breathing stories. Rarely have I encountered a director who has an understanding of the design and production side for communicating with the audience as deeply as Marino. His *Much Ado About Nothing*, set in post–Civil War Wilmington, made that show come alive and achieve a relevance for me that it never had before: not just a romantic comedy but a genuine struggle of family reconciliation and refusal to forgive. Strand's Benedict was a study in contrasts: the face he showed his cronies, the face he

showed his host, the face he showed his enemies, and the face he longed to show Beatrice. As a gentleman of that era he hit the nail on the head.

To hear that Marino is moving toward developing a resident theater company is not a surprise. He seems to relish the performers he has found that connect with him artistically, and they appear repeatedly in his work as their relationship deepens.

"I've been calling myself an actor for the better part of a quarter-century; this will be the first time I've done four shows in a year since probably 2003," Strand says. Much like Viola in *Twelfth Night*, Strand's time in Wilmington comprises a series of adventures and unexpected opportunities. For example, when Marino was putting together a fundraiser for Alchemical Theatre, he asked Strand to bring a monologue to perform.

"Biggest surprise of Mark? The relevance of it."

"He asks, 'What monologue are you going to do?' I'm never going to get to play Hamlet. Olivier played it at 48 — maybe someday I will do old Hamlet. I thought, here's a role I've always wanted to do. Here's a way I can at least do some of it." One Rogue and Peasant Slave monologue later, Marino drops a hint in Strand's ear about performing the Gospel of St. Mark as a one-man show, it would be part of something Marino's brain had been incubating called "The King James Initiative (KJI)." The King James Version of the Bible (KJV) was begun in 1604 after decades of suppressing an English language Bible. Completed in 1611, it remains a beautiful literary work and a milestone in religious writing. The first printing was a large folio edition intended to be read aloud in church.

"The quality of the poets and the scholars that they brought in produced something that was just beautiful and readable and memorable," Strand notes.

"The KJV was created to be spoken or read aloud and functions very well this way. It is very exciting to share this text with an audience that may not frequent the theater. KJV has a parallel existence to the work of Shakespeare and his contemporaries," Marino observes. "It could attract a whole new audience to text-based theater, and the language of the King James is gorgeous." Strand comments that with Mark he has encountered a phenomenon completely alien to him before: the audience sitting with the text open in their laps, following along.

The idea of performing the King James Version, and the Gospel of Mark particularly, is not new. Sir Alec McCowen began performing the Book of Mark in 1978. He eventually took that one-man show to Broadway and even Jimmy Carter's White House. David Suchet, whose audio recording of the Bible is so well known, also has a one-man reading of the Gospel of St. Mark that he brought to St. Paul's Cathedral in London in 2017. "In terms of cultural significance the impact on the language was greater than Shakespeare's because it was the daily book," Strand observes. "Also in terms of forming national identity. These are all downstream effects of the separation from the Catholic Church. But it was really what gave part of the formation of England's national identity. The effect on the language was tremendous. So many of our common phrases — in the same way of Shakespeare — come from the King James Version of the Bible." Sir Alec McCowen concurred when he commented in 1990 to Benedict Nightingale of *The New York Times*: "That was the time Shakespeare was writing his last great plays, so it's almost like having a Shakespeare masterpiece to myself. I have the whole thing, I play all the parts. There's pleasure in that, I can tell you."

Matching the right performer to the right material is the essential problem of casting that every director faces. But for Marino, Strand was a natural choice for Mark: "He has the intellect and language sensibility for this kind of text. He is funny, and that is an intuitive part of his work, so it would keep the piece from becoming too overly serious or reverential. The text actually has great humor in it. Comedic actors can be quite compelling in more serious material."

The venues for performing the Gospel of Mark vary: St. Jude's Metropolitan Community Church hosted a performance last June. Later in the summer, Strand and the KJI brought the Gospel to Old Books on Front St. Standing in the back I confess to being mesmerized at Strand's evocative rendition of the Gospel. Unlike McCowan who used a set and props, Strand uses only a music stand and still reads much of Mark from the text. "If you look at it as something that had to be performed, because even when it was written the vast majority of people were illiterate so they only experienced it as heard storytelling — and of course if you're not bringing it to life — you are not going to hold their attention," Strand notes. Many of the audience members, including the bookstore staff, commented that it was a vastly different experience than church. To hear not just a verse or two, but rather the entire Gospel as one sustained presentation, is extremely powerful. Strand notes that when he read the piece as a whole with an eye to performance he was struck by how engaging and narrative-driven it is.

"This thing is so playable. It is just plot point to plot point . . . there are a lot of different characters and you have the ability to paint a very vivid picture if you so choose." He shakes his head. "Then, like any good show, the second act really takes off. You know the first act it's like 'this is interesting, I've not seen it this way before'. But by the time you get to the second act, it is devastating. You know? And the simplicity of it, is what's so moving to me."

Probably because of the religious nature of the text, many people are curious about Strand's own religious views and how the performances influence or change that. McCowen was brought up in a religious household but as an adult sought the Divine in nature, rather than a building or structured hierarchy. David Suchet's adult conversion to the Church of England has motivated his Bible recording, and documentaries about

St. Paul and St. Peter. Strand's answers are far from simplistic — and also far from seeking to please his listeners: "Biggest surprise of Mark? The relevance of it. The continuing relevance of it. I haven't sorted these thoughts out completely yet . . . But the connection between healing and authority. Every time Jesus heals someone in Mark the first thing he does is say: 'Don't tell anyone.' The first time the Pharisees think to destroy him by reporting him to the imperial authorities is when he heals a guy who's possessed. What is the significance of that?" Physically the man on the couch in front of me is oscillating between an actor with enormous physical performance skills and a very quiet, introspective discussion with himself. He begins quoting, "Beware of the scribes who love to go in long robes . . . ." Strand's eyes flash, he cocks his head to the side and grins. "Just within the religious context he could be talking about any televangelist now," he says. "There is something about that Gospel that talks about the tension between personal responsibility and central authority. It is the confusion of what properly belongs to Caesar and what properly belongs to God." Strand lets out a breath. "In other words, 'Much authority depends upon the illusion of needing authority.' Which, in another way of speaking, is a protection racket."

Strand is an amazing storyteller in his own right. Indeed, conversations with him tend to follow a pattern of him setting up a story, leading you along a path and then surprising you with a punchline that you didn't expect. If you know that he has worked extensively in stand-up comedy, that gives some context to the pattern. One could list his credits and accomplishments in that arena, which include winning the Hong Kong International Comedy Competition (2009), and leaving his comedic mark on Ireland (including opening for Mick Foley during the 2011 UK and Ireland Tour, in addition to teaching stand-up comedy classes and workshops. But that barely scratches the surface, and there is one thing you realize quickly with Ashley Strand: This man might be funny, but it is because there is so much substance to his world view that he can draw upon.

"The itinerary of our family vacations was based around the great cathedrals of Europe," he says. "So we went from one great cathedral to another." He begins recounting from his childhood in Europe, where his father had a diplomatic posting. "To go in to those buildings . . . and the best was when you had been driving through the rain and you come in and you're inside and your senses get focused. Your senses are diffuse outside . . . but inside . . . there is less light and less sound. There are echoes. You are more aware of yourself, so you are quieter. You have the same amount of senses but fewer inputs . . . and then the clouds break and the sun bursts through these giant stained-glass windows and you feel transcendence. You can't help it — you get chills." His voice has taken on a quiet cadence that is almost hypnotic. He pauses and fixes his deep eyes on me for an instant before looking inward again. "Then you imagine the voices . . . the community of people spending their days in the field — having these sort of anonymous existences and they all come together on one day. To raise their voices . . . and harmonizing. The waves resonance . . . The echoes from your body . . . the physical even, of feeling transcendence is easier to understand. I could not have put that into words at 8 or 10 (years old) and getting the sense of this. But you get that hint and you don't forget it. That place is burned in your memory so indelibly, then you can revisit and put new information into it."

Strand brings to life generations of artisans toiling to build a cathedral that most of them would never see finished. "The vast majority of the community was on the knife's edge of survival. When you look around here a lot of people are scraping to get by but does it turn into great community art? Not really, no."

For Marino, part of the artistic responsibility of a theater company is not just to produce shows. "We want to train the new generation of Shakespeare practitioners with Wilmington as the base of operations. We feel this is a great thing for UNCW, Wilmington and Alchemical." To that end, Alchemical is focusing on the two summer shows their residential, repertory education program, Make Trouble, will produce in conjunction with Lumina Festival of the Arts: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Timon of Athens*. In the fall Marino is feeling drawn to producing one of the tragedies, most likely in a found space (like his *Measure for Measure* was produced in Sputnik Night Club). In five years he plans for Alchemical to have their own space, "where we can produce and curate other works of art and theater. Wilmington also needs a multi-use art space that has mid-size music venue potential and will be its own scene. As for professional work, we would like to have a multi-show season of various work on offer and to be able to incubate and produce new work." But like Strand, he sees a destination, regional Shakespeare company as the goal.

"Just within the religious context he could be talking about any televangelist now," he says.

"In 10 years Alchemical will be a destination theater and arts space that serves this region and draws audience from all over the state. A company that experiments with theatrical form and innovation." Always the teacher, he concludes: "We also want to develop a fully staffed education department devoted to working in communities that need artistic outreach."

The Gospel of Mark is currently booking performances in Florida and North Carolina. The next performance scheduled in Wilmington is at the Apostolic Tabernacle Church, 712 Wellington Ave., on April 27th, 2-4 p.m. (Admission is free but donations are accepted.) www.kingjameslive.org

Gwenyfar Rohler spends her days managing her family's bookstore on Front Street.

Into the Woods

Nothing is more inspiring in early spring than a nature walk

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY VIRGINIA HOLMAN

When we moved to the Cape Fear region some 15 years ago, one of the things I mourned publicly was the loss of the four distinct storybook seasons I had enjoyed in the Piedmont. I emailed an old friend during my first full year here in which I described a skillet-hot summer punctuated by fumes of fresh asphalt and diesel, followed by the cloudy-rainy-not-exactly-cool season that led to the cold-cloudy-early-sunset season (which to be fair, was also endured at my previous home). This led me to comment on the two spring days I enjoyed the most: the day in early May when I could wear my favorite white pointelle sweater outside without being too warm or too cold, and the day honeysuckle blooms and fills the air with its sweet scent. After that, the heat (and with it the din of air conditioners) arrived.

I may have exaggerated to my friend. Like many transplants, I was homesick and moody and on a perpetual diet because I thought living at the beach meant I was expected to wear a swimsuit three "seasons" a year. I was exasperated that living in Zone 8 meant I'd accidentally tossed out an expensive lot of tulip bulbs that I was told had to hibernate all winter in my freezer, not in the ground, or they would refuse to bloom. I missed the tender nodding hellebores I used to plant along the shaded edge of our Piedmont lot. In other words, the Cape Fear region wasn't love at first sight, and I felt guilty about that — didn't everyone want to live at the beach? Oddly enough, guilt didn't ease my self-imposed suffering one whit; it was just a prism that refracted the past and kept me from moving forward in my new life.

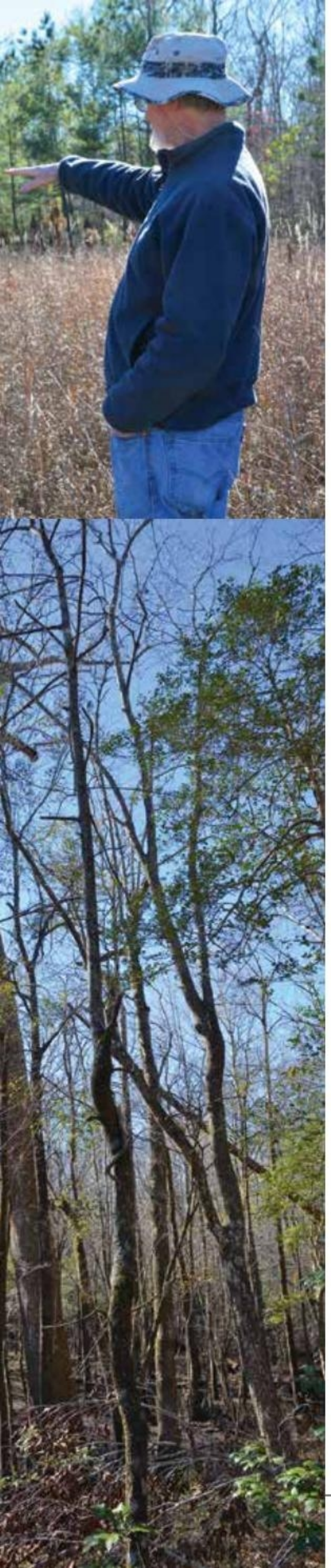
Slowly, I gave up the guilt, and counterintuitively what went with it was habitual longing for the life I'd left behind. As year after year in my new home passed, I found that the coastal plain had more life and complexity than I had first realized. So, if you are a transplant yearning for signs of spring but don't know where to look, here are a couple of places you can venture to walk quietly and look closely. If you visit these areas regularly, you can observe the slow, subtle shift of winter to spring, a sacred time of awakening, migration and regeneration that even a long season of storms can't contain or destroy.

Perhaps the most pleasant spring hike you may take is to little-visited Ev-Henwood, a conservation area located in a still rural area of Leland, North Carolina. The name is pronounced exactly the same as performer and North Carolina native Evan Rachel Wood — if you omit the middle name and elide the first and last names. Local folks also like say it rhymes with Heavenwood, which is apt, since this protected land is a nature lover's paradise. The 174-acre protected area is open from sunrise to sunset, and its trails meander through several important areas, including a preserved area that is used to teach students at UNCW about longleaf pine savannas and the process known as old field succession. Several trails run through the property; in addition, there is a remote, quiet bottomland trail that winds alongside Town Creek. The conservation area is owned and managed by UNC Wilmington and nearly 65 acres of the property that runs along Town Creek is protected by the Coastal Land Trust.

Unlike a state park, Ev-Henwood is not heavily maintained, but as an educational conservation site, it is well monitored. Among the list of rules and regulations is this note: "Observe your pathway carefully. No management of dangerous animals or poisonous plants is in effect on the property." In other words, if you rest your hand on a tree beside the trail that happens to be covered in poison ivy, you'll itch, and if you see an alligator swimming in a pond, don't be too surprised.

This devotion to maintaining the area's wildness makes Ev-Henwood a uniquely appealing site. Unlike a state park, most trails are narrow and lightly marked, with informational signage that only adds to the pleasantness of the experience. If you visit in early spring, take the Beechnut Trail. You'll notice that as you walk past the parking area, man-made noises quickly give way to the rustle of the wind through the bare branches. This is my favorite time to stroll the area. The biting bugs are down, and because the upland trees have yet to leaf, it's easier to see some of the interesting birds in the area. Birders who visit the area in the spring report many notable sightings, so take your binoculars. As you move from upland areas to bottomland swamp, you may get looks at yellow-billed cuckoos, red-eyed vireos, ovenbirds and summer tanagers, and as you approach the bottomland, you may get nice looks at resplendent yellow prothonotary warblers and vivid indigo buntings. These songbirds not only have fine plumage, but they also grace the forest with songs that are uncommonly beautiful. Visitors who take this trail will be rewarded when they reach Town Creek with a view of a massive bald cypress tree that looks like it has a keyhole carved at the top. Known as Old Gus, this splendid tree is indeed the king of the forest, towering over a gentle running creek of laurel oaks and buttressed black gums. If you're quiet, you may even hear one of the barred owls that frequents the area calling, *Who-cooks-for-you?*

Between the upland and bottomland areas at Ev-Henwood there are two wide fields. These areas appear just after you cross a small land bridge across a small pond. Roger Shew, an environmental education lecturer at UNC Wilmington, helps manage this area with the help of his students. These old farm fields are where longleaf pine was once harvested for naval stores. (Visitors who take the Dogwood Trail will come upon an old tar kiln at the end of the trail — essential for produc-



ing pitch, commonly used to waterproof ships.) Ev-Henwood has some interesting history as well. According to a UNCWs informational pamphlet about the area, it was originally settled by a small group of native Americans. In 1799, the property was deeded to John Basset Evans, and except for a period of 20 years between 1948 and 1967, the property remained in the Evans family until it was entrusted to UNCW in 1991 as a research site and nature preserve.

About four years ago, Roger Shew and his students began the laborious process of transforming this small area into a longleaf pine savanna. The open land was tilled, longleaf seedlings were planted, and wire grass was added. Shew explains that the fields are illustrative of the process of old field succession — the long, slow process by which certain species of plants are replaced by other species. In the 18th century, longleaf pine was the most populous tree in the Cape Fear region. However, the advent of fire suppression efforts and the harvesting of the longleaf forest resulted in areas of oak and hickory forest, which is the climax species for our region. Longleaf pines are a fire-dependent species (most public lands conduct controlled burns of longleaf savannas), and the wiregrass helps move the fire quickly through the understory. When people visit the fields, they are really looking at an outdoor classroom. Shew points out that they can observe the natural progression that occurs in our area when a field is left to return to its natural state. First, it is taken over by broom sedge, a species that helps spread fire; this process helps transform the area into a longleaf pine savanna. If fires don't continue, the longleaf eventually is replaced by oak and hickory trees. Unfortunately, last year's 8 feet of rain and the flooding from Hurricane Florence set the progress made in one field back a few years. After the storm, some of the younger trees were submerged beneath the floodwaters of Town Creek for days; they now look a bit like saguaro cacti woven from pine needles. It's an eerie sight, but Shew doesn't seem daunted — with his student assistants to help, he will simply replant. Perhaps when you're accustomed to teaching students about field and forest succession, you learn to take the long view.

Another favorite spring walk in the woods is along the newer trails within Carolina Beach State Park. This park also offers well-maintained trails and the opportunity to hike along some of the loveliest coastal trails in our region. Two of my favorite trails are those that run alongside the water. The aptly named Snow's Cut Trail begins behind the main picnic area and meanders along the steep, dramatic bluffs along Snow's Cut waterway. Early spring is a wonderful time to observe bird life in the area. Late March often offers a nice variety of birds, including black and white warbler, hermit thrush, osprey, bald eagles, white throated warblers and the occasional early painted bunting. Fox squirrels, with their gentle manner and white ringed nose, also frequent the woods in this area. This larger, slower and significantly cuter cousin of the gray squirrel ranges in color from pure black to red to gray. And if you like fungus, you'll see lots of turkey tails sprouting from trees felled and waterlogged by Hurricane Florence. Nature lets nothing go to waste. Although this trail is quite beautiful, and it affords hikers access to the water, it's worth noting that the sandy banks are quite steep and unstable. Also, the water that runs through Snow's Cut is treacherous due to its depth and the powerful tidal influences of both nearby Carolina Beach Inlet and the Cape Fear River. Adults, children and pets should never dare swim or wade in Snow's Cut.

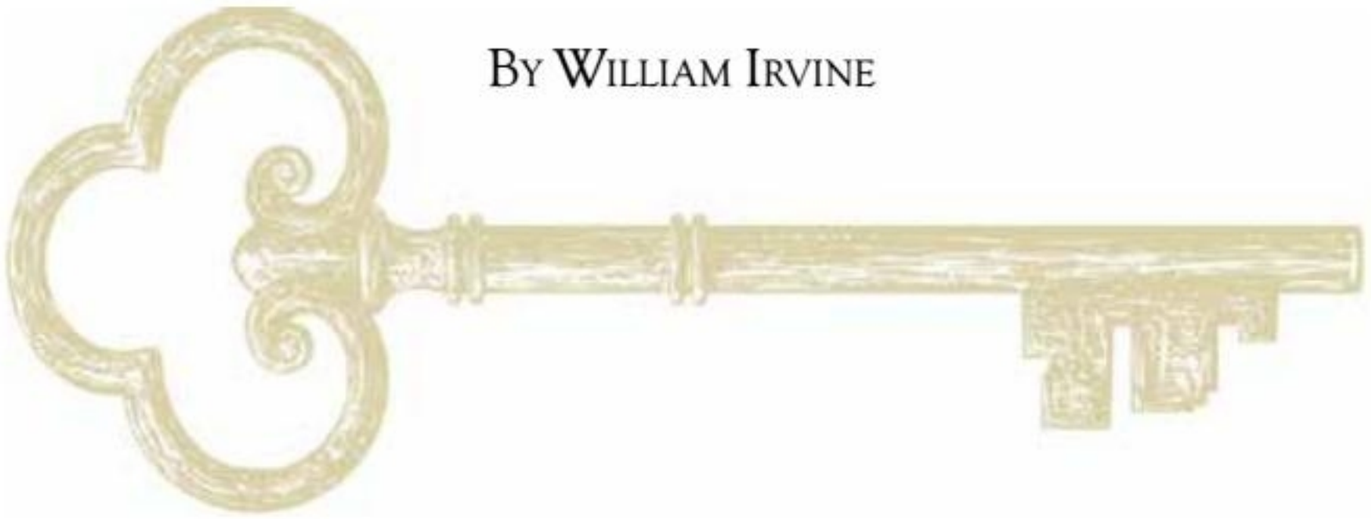
Carolina Beach State Park's newest riparian trail is the Sand Live Oak Trail, which is a southerly continuation of the Sugarloaf Trail. This trail feels quite remote. Take plenty of water and sunscreen. When it begins, it's surprisingly shady as you wind your way along the Cape Fear River and past some large stands of dead pine and cedar trees. Slow down in these areas. This is a great spot to see red-headed woodpeckers and fish crows. If you're lucky, you may even see a termite swarm rise up from the fallen trees. Trust me, it's a surprisingly lovely sight — like a cloud of sparkling fairy dust. After about 3/4 of a mile, you'll pass a stand of magnificent live oak trees before heading east across an ancient sand dune forest, which has little shade and can be slow going through the soft sand, especially on a warm day. The landscape itself is haunting — small turkey oaks, pines, and wave after wave of small, sugary white sand dunes that seem to stretch on for a long while, so far, in fact, that they may make you hope for cooler weather. To paraphrase Mark Twain, if you don't like the weather in coastal North Carolina, just wait a day, it'll change.

Virginia Holman lives and writes in Carolina Beach.

Ev-Henwood, 6150 Rock Creek Road NE, Leland. No pets or bicycles are permitted on the trails. Roger Shew occasionally runs trips to the area for groups through UNCW's OLLI program and may arrange tours for private groups and interested organizations to learn more. Email him at shewr@uncw.edu. Carolina Beach State Park, 1010 State Park Road, Carolina Beach. The park hosts numerous walks and events. Check out their upcoming events at www.ncparks.gov/carolina-beach-state-park/events-and-programs.

Preservationists & Patriots

The National Society of The Colonial Dames of America in The State of North Carolina have been leaders in the historic preservation movement for 125 years



By William Irvine

Genealogy is big business these days. Ancestry.com and other online tools, as well as the hit television series *Who Do You Think You Are?* and *Finding Your Roots*, have inspired millions of Americans to become more interested in their forebears. Family — everybody's got one.

Certainly no one is as well-versed on this subject as the National Society of The Colonial Dames of America in The State of North Carolina, which has served as a quiet but dynamic force in the preservation of historic properties across the state since its founding in 1894. From their offices in the Burgwin-Wright House — which they purchased in 1937 to save from demolition — the Dames have been celebrating North Carolina's early history through public programs, scholarships and preservation for 125 years. With more than 1,700 members statewide, the North Carolina chapter is the largest of a national association of state societies.(There are 44 state societies with more than 15,000 members nationwide). And the Dames are going strong — the organization has seen a resurgence of interest among younger members, many of whom are daughters or granddaughters of the current Dames.

Long before the general population saw the importance of our city's architectural heritage, the Wilmington Dames were sounding the trumpets. Beginning in 1899, they made an annual pilgrimage to St. Philip's Church in Brunswick Town, traveling downriver by steamboat for a community picnic on the site of the towering ruins. They have erected monuments and markers throughout North Carolina to honor historical Colonial figures and places. The Dames brought a preservation proposal before the Wilmington City Council as early as 1930; a similar ordinance would not be approved until 30 years later. "We were way ahead of our time, but Charleston beat us by a year," says Joy Allen, the executive director of the North Carolina society. Here are four important North Carolina houses that owe their existence to the preservation efforts of the Dames.

The Burgwin-Wright House

WILMINGTON

The Burgwin-Wright House barely survived the wrecker's ball. Built by the prosperous merchant and plantation owner John Burgwin in 1771 on the foundations of the abandoned city jail, the house passed through a series of owners in the 19th century, among them Judge Joshua Grainger Wright, whose family owned the house through the Civil War. After the last owner of the house died in 1930, the property was conveyed to the Wilmington Savings and Trust Company as trustees. At the time the house was a wreck — the lot next door to the house on Market Street was a used-car lot and remained so until 1967, when the Dames were able to purchase the land.

Alden Hopkins, the landscape architect from Colonial Williamsburg, created the initial plans and blueprints for the re-creation of an 18th-century garden that has replaced it. In 1937 the structure was purchased by the Colonial Dames for $21,000 and during World War II was known as the Lord Cornwallis Officer's Club and Lounge, and used by armed forces officers and their families. After the war, the basement was rented to the Junior League as a tea room, and by 1948 the Colonial Dames owned the house outright, debt-free, and decided to restore it as their headquarters. After several periods of restoration — the most important being the 1992 removal of the Colonial Revival portico and its replacement by a period-appropriate reconstruction — the house stands today as one of the most important surviving 18th-century houses in eastern North Carolina.

The Joel Lane House

RALEIGH

Born in Halifax County and an early pioneer in the Piedmont, Joel Lane was a man of many accomplishments. A representative to the Provincial Congress in Hillsborough, he served as a justice in the county court and a lieutenant colonel of the militia during the Revolutionary War. He was also one of the first trustees of the University of North Carolina and offered the university a square mile of his land near present-day Cary for the site of the campus (the offer was declined).

Built around 1760, Lane's house predates the founding of Raleigh and is consequentially the city's oldest dwelling. It was here that commissioners from the General Assembly met to determine the location of the state's capital in 1792; they inevitably purchased 1,000 acres of Lane's property and established the state's permanent seat.

Joel and his second wife both died in 1795 and the house passed through several owners until it was purchased by the Wake County branch of the Dames in 1927. After a period of benign neglect, in 1968 the North Carolina General Assembly and the Colonial Dames financed an eight-year restoration project. The site has been open as a house museum since 1976.

The Fourth House

OLD SALEM

Established by Moravians in 1766, the town of Salem had its modest beginnings in a row of half-timbered houses along the main street that were named chronologically in order of completion. The Fourth House, completed in 1768, was first home to Charles Holder, a saddler, who lived in the house until his death in 1808. In swift succession came a cabinetmaker and a handful of other owners until the arrival of a trolley line in 1889, when a regrading of Main Street required that Fourth House be moved to the back of its lot. Over the next decades, the neighborhood suffered much neglect, and by 1936, the Fourth House was the only house of the original row still standing, and the oldest house in Winston-Salem.

The establishment in 1950 of Old Salem, Inc., a nonprofit foundation dedicated to the restoration of the old town, changed everything. By 1966, Old Salem had restored 23 buildings. The Colonial Dames were able to purchase the Fourth House for restoration, and under a long-term lease agreement, Old Salem maintains the property and today rents the house to private tenants. Its architectural significance as one of the few half-timbered houses in America is due to its rescue by the Colonial Dames and Old Salem, which has studied the construction techniques of Fourth House to reconstruct First, Third, and Fifth Houses along the main street.

Haywood Hall

RALEIGH

John Haywood, the first treasurer of the new state of North Carolina, began construction of the Federal-style Haywood Hall in 1799 and lived here with his wife, Eliza, and their 12 children until his death in 1827. It is a rare example of a historic house that has remained in the same family — with a few contemporary renovations: indoor plumbing; a two-story addition that housed at different times family law and doctor's offices; and a schoolroom was moved and converted to a library. The Colonial Dames inherited the property from John Haywood's granddaughter in 1977 and have restored Haywood Hall to its former glory, funding new roofs, chimney repairs, rewiring and painting. Much of the family furniture and portraits remain, providing an elegant time capsule of upper-class life in 19th century Raleigh.

William Irvine is the senior editor of Salt.

WILMINGTON WOMAN'S CLUB · SEPTEMBER 21, 1964 ·

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Kristy Woodson Harvey
at the 40th Annual
Coastal Living Show

March 23, 2019
at 11 a.m. & 2 p.m.

The Coastal Living Show is the one and only annual fundraiser
of the Wilmington Woman's Club, a 501(c) 3 organization.
All of the profits from the event are returned to the community
to enrich the lives of primarily women and children.

SAT.03/09 10am-5pm
SUN.03/10 noon-5pm
BROOKLYN ARTS CENTER at ST. ANDREWS
MADE IN
BOTH DAYS
$5
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(910) 538-2939 | WWW.BROOKLYNARTSNC.COM | VENDOR INFO: Contact Austin@BrooklynArtsNC.com

WARM
Raise the Roof Gala and Auction
Anchors Away Soirée
Friday, May 31, 2019
Holiday Inn Resort - Wrightsville Beach
Live music by:
Port City Shakedown!
Support WARM's long-term
Hurricane Florence recovery
Tickets and Info:
www.warmraisetheroof.org

2019
Herb & Garden Fair
SATURDAY & SUNDAY
March 30th
9-5 PM
March 31st
10-4 PM
Admission $5
Ages 12 & Under Free
poplargrove.org
Poplar Grove
PLANTATION

ALMANAC

March

By Ash Alder

"And here is the serpent again," wrote the late poet Mary Oliver, "dragging himself out from his nest of darkness . . . looking for the sun."

Three decades after she wrote it, Oliver's "Spring" slides into consciousness. Oh, how you've missed these sunny mornings. As soft light filters through the kitchen window, you think of the snake, moving "like oil" over pine needles, tasting the air with its tongue.

March is here, and as an owl cries out from its distant nest, you taste the glorious poetry of spring.

Pink blossoms against leafless branches on the saucer magnolia.

Pink squirrel babes, blind and wriggling in their drey.

Pink rain jacket left hanging on the porch, pocket full of pine straw, blue bird flitting in and out of periphery.

This year, the spring equinox arrives on March 20, in tandem with World Poetry Day on March 21.

Fitting.

And as you gently scoop the contents from your jacket pocket — a beautiful tapestry of needles and grasses — you think again of Mary Oliver, and of the delicate treasures she wove with nature and light.

Thank you, blue bird, for starting over.

Thank you, black snake, winding round the rising grass.

Thank you, poet within each of us, for acknowledging the beauty that is always waiting for us, like sunlight after a long, dark winter.

Hello, sun in my face.
Hello you who made the
morning and spread it
over the fields . . . Watch,
now, how I start the day in
happiness, in kindness.

— Mary Oliver

Nature's Bard

In honor of the beloved and recently departed best-selling poet Mary Oliver, who made tangible the heart-breaking beauty of the natural world, and World Poetry Day on March 21, below is an excerpt from "When Death Comes," in which the poet "considers eternity as another possibility."

When it's over, I want to say: all my life
I was a bride married to amazement.
I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms.

When it's over, I don't want to wonder
if I have made of my life something particular, and real.
I don't want to find myself sighing and frightened,
or full of argument.

I don't want to end up simply having visited this world.

Thank you, dear poet, for taking such transient beauty into your arms. And for those considering eternity: Oliver's "Such Singing in the Wild Branches" is good medicine.

Amethyst Falls

I once heard someone dub wisteria the "evil overlord of the plant kingdom" and, for better or worse, have never been able to shake it. If ever you've battled with wisteria in your backyard, perhaps you've given it a comparable name. But if you're still reading this . . . if ever you've wished to make friends with this intoxicatingly fragrant vine, consider introducing a native cultivar, amethyst falls.

Less aggressive than its exotic Asian relatives known for choking out trees and, yep, swallowing houses, amethyst falls blooms on new growth, making the vines easier to prune back and train. Although the leaves and cascading purple flowers are smaller than the common wisteria you may have given a less-than-kind name, an established amethyst falls plant can climb 15–20 feet per season.

Bonus points: It's drought tolerant and deer resistant.

March Garden To-Do

Replace winter mulch

Sharpen dull mower blades

Sow seeds for spinach, radishes, turnips, and kale

Stop and smell the flowering redbud and dogwood

Arts Calendar

Mardi Gras Casino Night

3/2

Made In NC

3/10

Wilmington Biz Expo

3/27

To add a calendar event, please contact calendar@saltmagazinenc.com. Events must be submitted by the first of the month, one month prior to the event.

3/1 & 2 Cinema Sisters International Film Festival

The Wilmington Female Filmmakers Collective (WilmFFilm) hosts this annual event, focusing on films and videos under 30 minutes made by women. Directors this year come from Spain, Italy, Russia, Canada and Vietnam, as well as across the United States. Jengo's Playhouse, 815 Princess St., Wilmington. Info: wilmffilms.com/chick-flicks-film-festival.

3/2 Mardi Gras Casino Night

7-10 p.m. Let the good times (and the dice) roll at the Mardi Gras Casino Night at the Bellamy Mansion Museum. The event features casino games, signature cocktails, live music, a raffle, as well as a bourbon bar. Admission price includes gaming chips, raffle tickets and two cocktails. Tickets: $75. Bellamy Mansion Museum, 503 Market St., Wilmington. For info: (910) 251-3700 or bellamymansion.org.

3/2 & 3 Always . . . Patsy Cline

7:30 p.m. Opera House Theatre Company presents this tribute to country music legend Patsy Cline, who died in a plane crash at age 30 in 1963. Among the hits: *I Fall to Pieces*, *Crazy* and *Walking After Midnight*. Admission: $32. Thalian Hall, 310 Chestnut St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 632-2285 or operahouse.squarespace.com.

3/3 The Best of Broadway at Brunswick

3 p.m. Thalian Association Community Theatre presents "The Best of Broadway at Brunswick," a tribute to American musical theater featuring local performers. Hosted by Jeff Rivenbark, the event supports TACT theatrical productions and youth theater programs. Admission: $25. Leland Cultural Arts Center, 1212 Magnolia Village Way, Leland. Info: (910) 251-1788 or thalian. org.

3/5 Afro Latin Jazz Ensemble

7:30 p.m. This octet, led by jazz artist Arturo O'Farrill, celebrates the pioneers of Latin jazz. Admission: $25-75. Kenan Auditorium, UNCW, 515 Wagoner Drive, Wilmington. Info: (910) 962-3500 or uncw.edu/arts/presents/2018-2019/alje.

3/7 The Queen's Cartoonists

7:30 p.m. The musical group The Queen's Cartoonists presents a light-hearted evening of music from animated films — everything from Disney classics to cult and modern cartoons, accompanied by video animation and vocals. Admission: $15-36. Thalian Hall, 310 Chestnut St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 632-2285 or thalianhall.org.

3/7 Pints for Preservation

5 p.m. Come raise a glass to benefit the Bellamy Mansion and the Historic Wilmington Foundation. $1 per glass goes to donations. Wilmington Brewing Company, 824 S. Kerr Ave., Wilmington. For info:

3/8 An Evening With the Chieftains

7:30 p.m. UNCW and Cape Fear State present An Evening With the Chieftains, longtime interpreters of traditional Irish music and six-time Grammy Award winners. Admission: $25-75. Kenan Auditorium, UNCW, 515 Wagoner Drive, Wilmington. For info: (910) 962-3500.

3/8 Wrightsville Beach Marathon Madness

The New Hanover Regional Medical Center's Wrightsville Beach Marathon Madness includes courses of varying length, from marathon to 1K fun run. Admission: $15-110. Causeway Drive (in front of the post office), Wrightsville Beach. Info: wrightsvillebeachmarathon.com.

3/8 & 9 Wilmington Boys Choir Concert

Friday, 7:30 p.m.; Saturday, 3:30 p.m. St. Paul's Episcopal Church hosts the Wilmington Boys Choir Concert, which this year features a program including Noah's Flood, by Benjamin Britten. Admission: $15. St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 16 N. 16th St., Wilmington Info: (910) 762-4578 or spechurch.org.

3/9 Ninth Annual Cape Fear Wine and Beer Festival

1-5 p.m. More than 60 American breweries and wineries will offer their wares. Other attractions include a DJ and silent auction. Admission: $15-50. Wilmington Convention Center, 515 Nutt St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 251-5101 or capefearbeerfest.com.

3/10 Made In NC

Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Sunday, 12 to 5 p.m. Come see the handiwork of more than 50 vendors at this annual crafts show. Food trucks and cash bar. Admission: $5. Kids under 13 free. Brooklyn Arts Center, 516 N. Fourth St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 538-2939 or brooklynartsnc.com.

3/11 22nd Annual Wilmington Symphony Orchestra Golf Classic

8 a.m. Hit the links for a day of great scenery, great food and golf at this fundraiser for the Wilmington

Symphony Orchestra and its youth education programs. Registration: $150-1,300. Eagle Point Golf Club, 8131 Bald Eagle Lane, Wilmington. For info and registration: wilmingtonsymphony.org.

3/13 **Rosie Herrera Dance Theater**

7:30 p.m. The Rosie Herrera Dance Theater presents Make Believe, a performance that uses religious iconography to explore broader themes. Admission: $22-$25. Wilson Center, 703 N. Third St., Wilmington. For info: (910) 362-7999 or cfcc.edu.

3/15 & 16 **Rumors: An Elegant Farce**

7:30 p.m.; Sunday, 3 p.m. Thalian Association presents *Rumors: An Elegant Farce*, a Neil Simon comedy set in New York City. Admission: $20-$25. Scottish Rite Temple, 1415 S. 17th St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 251-1788 or thalian.org.

3/15 & 16 **Suddenly Last Summer**

7:30 p.m., Sunday, 3 p.m. The Cube Theatre presents Tennessee Williams' one-act play *Suddenly Last Summer*, a scandal-filled Southern Gothic tale set in New Orleans. Admission: $28. Thalian Hall, 310 Chestnut St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 632-2285 or thalianhall.org.

3/16 **Ability Garden Plant Sale**

9 a.m. to 12 p.m. Attention, spring gardeners: house plants, native plants, herbs and succulents for sale to benefit the Arboretum's Ability Garden programs. Admission: Free. New Hanover County Arboretum, 6206 Oleander Drive, Wilmington. For info: abilitygarden.org.

3/16 **15th Annual Steve Hadyu St. Patrick's Day Lo Tide Run**

7 a.m.-12 p.m. Carolina Beach Boardwalk is the start of this annual 5K and 10K race, which benefits cancer patients in New Hanover County. Admission: $30-50. Carolina Beach Boardwalk, Cape Fear Boulevard, Carolina Beach. Info: (910) 470-0674 or lotiderun.org.

3/ 19 & 20 **Jersey Boys**

7:30 p.m. Jersey Boys is a musical biography of the legendary Four Seasons, working-class boys from New Jersey who became international stars. Includes the hits *Big Girls Don't Cry, Walk Like a Man*, and *Can't Take My Eyes Off of You*, among others. Admission $42-$95. The Wilson Center, 703 N. Third St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 362-7999 or cfcc.edu.

3/ 20-22 **Preservation North Carolina Annual Conference**

Preservation North Carolina will hosts its annual conference in Wrightsville Beach this year, featuring architects, builders, historians, and other professionals. The weekend is open to anyone interested in old houses and preservation. Blockade Runner Beach Resort, 275 Waynick Blvd., Wilmington. For reservations and tickets: (919) 832-3652 or presnc.org/experience/events.

3/20 -24 **The Revolutionists**

8 p.m.; Sunday matinee, 3 p.m. Lauren Gunderson's play is set during the French Revolution and tells the story of four women of different backgrounds who unite for the common good. Admission: $18-25. Cape Fear Playhouse, 613 Castle St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 367-5237 or bigdawgproductions.org.

3/ 21-24 **16th Annual North Carolina Black Film Festival**

The Black Arts Alliance presents the 16th annual North Carolina Black Film Festival, a showcase of features, shorts, and documentaries. Highlights this year include Music in Film with a focus on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Admission: $8-50. Various venues. For info: (910) 431-9008 or blackartsalliance.org.

3/27 **Wilmington Biz Expo**

This annual event connects more than 2,500 business professionals. Keynote speaker is CEO Pierre Naude of nCino. The Expo Hall features more than 100 exhibitors and winners of the MADE competition. Other events include business

37th Annual Juried Spring Art Show & Sale

MARCH 30 – APRIL 7, 2019
Hannah Block Comunity Arts Center

Saturday, March 30th - Wednesday, April 3rd, 10am - 5pm
Thursday, April 4th - Saturday, April 6th, 10am - 7pm
Sunday, April 7th, 10am - 4pm

Presented by the Wilmington Art Association

Official Art Show of the Azalea Festival

INTRACOASTAL REALTY presents...
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benefitting
the Wrightsville Beach Museum of History

SAT MARCH 23 | The Historic Carolina Yacht Club 401 South Lumina Avenue Wrightsville Beach, NC 28480 | 5 PM

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seminars and after-hours networking. Admission: $45-1,000 for keynote lunch and admission Expo Hall and seminars. Wilmington Convention Center, 515 Nutt St., Wilmington. More info: (910) 508-5723 or wilmingtonbiz.com.

3/29 Chicago in Concert

7:30 p.m. The Wilson Center presents the 1970s powerhouse band Chicago, featuring a full horn section and performing such hits as *Feelin' Stronger Every Day* and *Saturday in the Park*. Admission: $49-169. The Wilson Center, 703 N. Third St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 362-7999 or cfcc.edu.

3/29-30 Striperfest

Friday, 5:30 p.m.; Saturday, 10a.m.-2p.m. Cape Fear River Watch's annual fundraiser will feature a Friday banquet, live and silent auctions, educational events, a tag-and-release fishing tournament and boat trips. See website for complete schedule of events. Coastline Convention Center, 503 Nutt St., Wilmington. For info: capefearriverwatch.org/news-events/striperfest.

3/30-4/7 37th Annual Juried Spring Art Show & Sale

Saturday-Wednesday, 10-5; Thursday-Saturday, 10-7; Sunday, 10-4. The Wilmington Art Association's 37th annual Juried Spring Art Show takes place this week at the Community Arts Center, featuring works in many media, ranging from painting to digital imaging, fiber art, printmaking and photography. Admission: Free. Community Arts, Center, 120 S. Second St., Wilmington. Info: wilmingtonart.org.

3/30 & 31 27th Annual Herb and Garden Fair

Saturday, 9-5; Sunday, 10-4. Everything you need for your spring garden, with vendors offering perennials, annuals, shrubs, and vegetables. There will be local artisans, live music and food concessions. Admission: $5. Kids under 13 are free. Poplar Grove Plantation, 10200 U.S. 17 North, Wilmington. Info: (910) 395-5999 or poplargrove.org.

WEEKLY HAPPENINGS

Monday Wrightsville Farmers Market

8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Curbside beach market offering a variety of fresh, locally grown produce, baked goods, plants and unique arts and crafts. Seawater Lane, Wrightsville Beach. Info: (910) 256-7925 or www.townofwrightsvillebeach.com.

Tuesday Wine Tasting

6 p.m. – 8 p.m. Free wine tasting hosted by a wine professional plus small plate specials all night. Admission: Free. The Fortunate Glass, 29 S. Front St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 399-4292 or www.fotunateglass.com.

Cape Fear Blues Jam

8 p.m. A night of live music performed by the area's best Blues musicians. Bring your instrument and join in the fun. Admission: Free. The Rusty Nail, 1310 S. Fifth Ave., Wilmington. Info: (910) 251-1888 or www.capefearblues.org.

Wednesday Free Wine Tasting at Sweet n Savory Cafe

5 p.m. – 8 p.m. Sample delicious wines for free. Pair them with a meal, dessert, or appetizer and learn more about the wines of the world. Live music starts at 7. Admission: Free. Sweet n Savory Cafe, 1611 Pavilion Place, Wilmington. Info: (910) 256-0115 or www.swetnsavorycafe.com.

Weekly Exhibition Tours

1:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. A weekly tour of the iconic Cameron Arts Museum, featuring presentations about the various exhibits and the selection and installation process. Cameron Arts Museum, 3201 S. 17th St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 395-5999 or www.cameronartsmuseum.org.

Ogden Farmers Market

8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Local farmers, producers and artisans sell fresh fruits, veggies, plants, eggs, cheese, meat,

honey, baked goods, wine, bath products and more. Ogden Park, 615 Ogden Park Drive, Wilmington. Info: (910) 538-6223 or www.wilmingtonandbeaches.com/events-calendar/ogden-farmers-market.

Poplar Grove Farmers Market

8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Open-air market held on the front lawn of historic Poplar Grove Plantation offering fresh produce, plants, herbs, baked goods and handmade artisan crafts. Poplar Grove Plantation, 10200 U.S. Highway 17 North, Wilmington. Info: (910) 395-5999 or www.poplargrove.org/farmers-market.

Thursday Wrightsville Beach Brewery Farmers Market

2 p.m. – 6 p.m. Come support local farmers and artisans every Thursday afternoon in the beer garden at the Wrightsville Beach Brewery. Shop for eggs, veggies, meat, honey, and handmade crafts while enjoying one of the Brewery's tasty beers. Stay for live music afterwards. Admission: Free. Wrightsville Beach Brewery, 6201 Oleander Drive, Wilmington. Info: (910) 256-4938 or www.wbbeer.com.

Yoga at the CAM

12–1 p.m. Join in a soothing retreat sure to charge you up while you relax in a beautiful, comfortable setting. Sessions are ongoing and are open to both beginners and experienced participants. Admission: $5–8. Cameron Art Museum, 3201 S. 17th St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 395-5999 or www.cameronartmuseum.org.

Friday and Saturday Cape Fear Museum Little Explorers

10 a.m. Meet your friends in Museum Park for fun, hands-on activities! Enjoy interactive circle time, conduct exciting experiments, and play games related to a weekly theme. Perfect for children ages 3 to 6 and their adult helpers. Admission: Free. Cape Fear Museum, 814 Market St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 798-4370 or www.capefearmuseum.com.

Blackwater Adventure Tours

Join in an educational guided boat tour from downtown Wilmington to River Bluffs, exploring the mysterious beauty of the Northeast Cape Fear River. See website for schedule. River Bluffs, 1100 Chair Road, Castle Hayne. Info: (910) 623-5015 or www.riverbluffsliving.com.

Saturday Carolina Beach Farmers Market

8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Outdoor "island-style" market featuring live music and local growers, producers and artisans selling fresh local produce, wines meats, baked goods, herbal products and handmade crafts. Carolina Beach Lake Park, Highway 421 & Atlanta Avenue, Carolina Beach. Info: (910) 458-2977 or www.carolinabeachfarmersmarket.com.

Wilmington Farmers Market at Tidal Creek

8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Weekly gathering of vetted vendors with fresh produce straight from the farm. Sign up for the weekly newsletter for advanced news of the coming weekend's harvest. 5329 Oleander Drive, Wilmington. For info: thewilmingtonfarmersmarket.com.

Riverfront Farmers Market

8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Curbside market featuring local farmers, producers, artisans, crafters and live music along the banks of the Cape Fear River. Riverfront Park, North Water Street, Wilmington. Info: (910) 538-6223 or wilmingtondowntown.com/events/farmers-market.

Taste of Downtown Wilmington

2:15 p.m., 2:45 p.m., & 3:15 p.m. A weekly gourmet food tour by Taste Carolina, featuring some of downtown Wilmington's best restaurants. Each time slot showcases different food. See website for details. Admission: $55–75. Riverwalk at Market Street, Wilmington. Info: (919) 237-2254 or www.tastecarolina.net/wilmington/.

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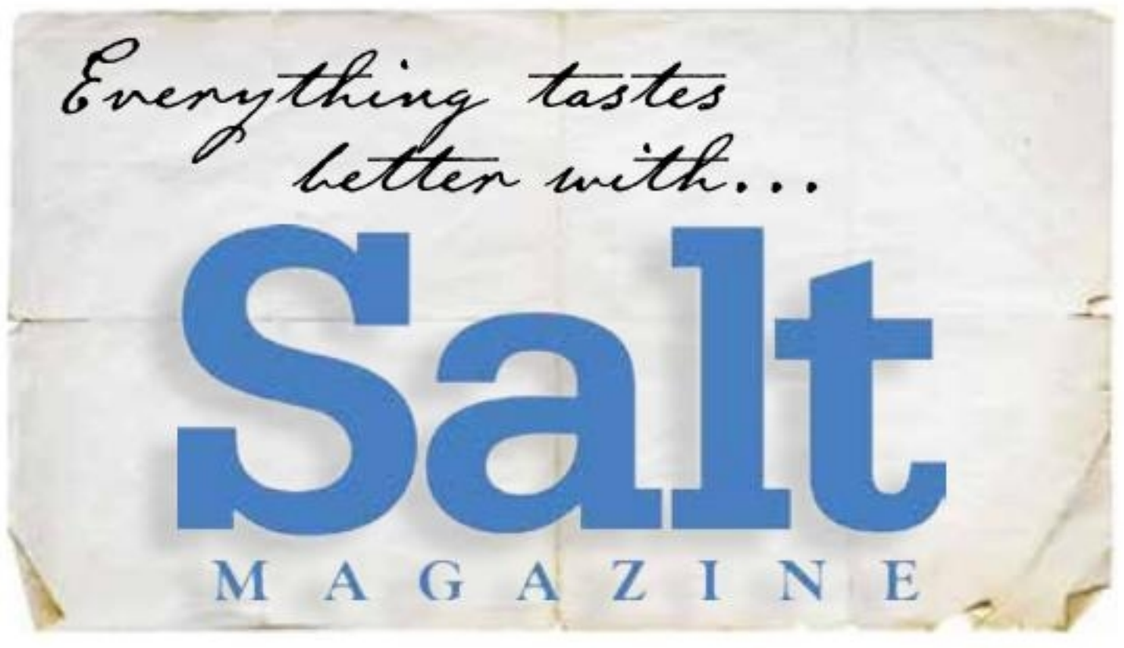


Port City People

New Hanover Regional Medical Center Founders' Gala

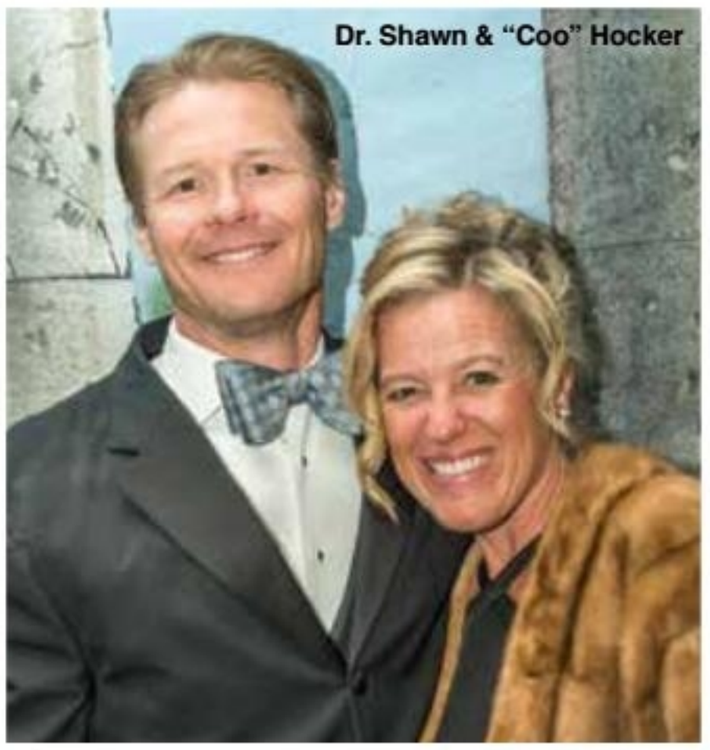
Air Wilmington Hangar

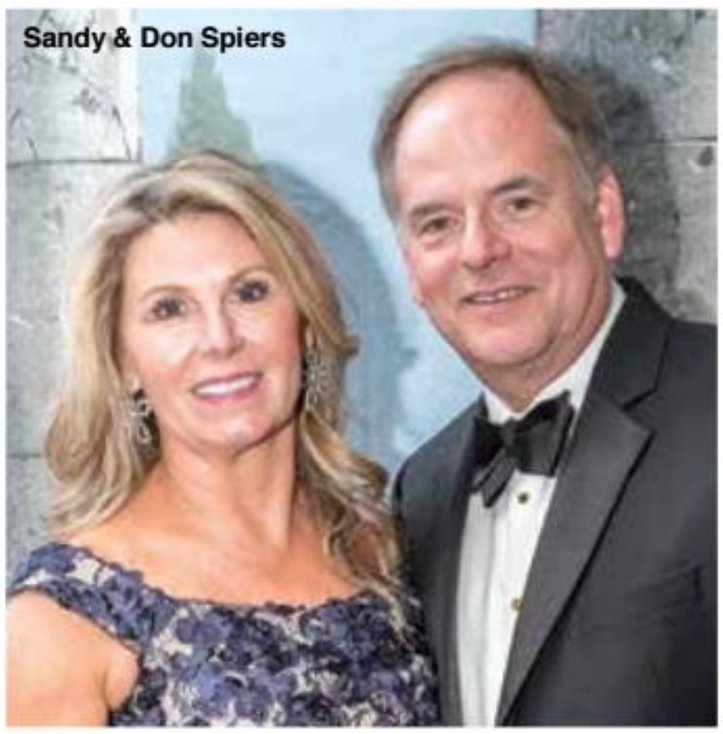
Saturday, January 26, 2019

Photographs by Bill Ritenour

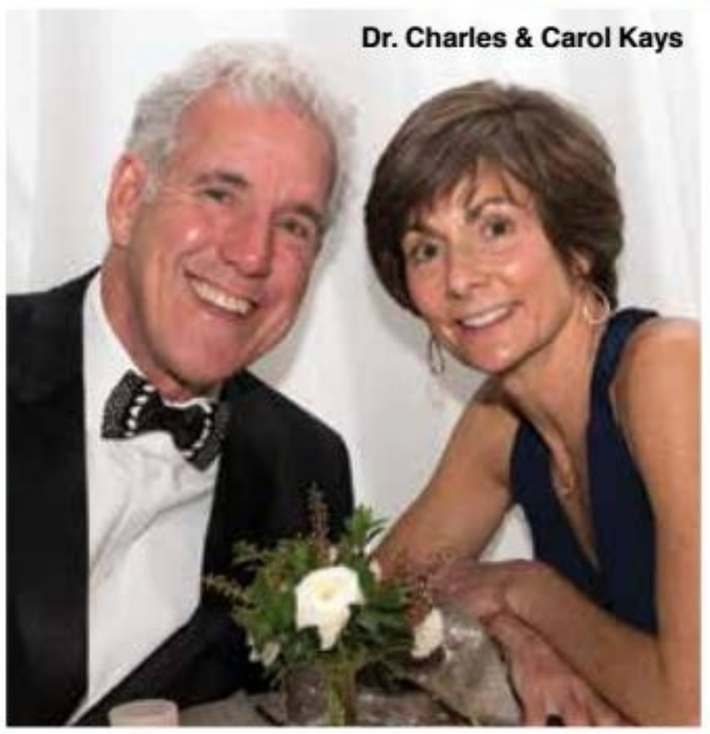
Brenden & Brianna Zink

Chuck Ohnmacht, Kathryn Peruza, Jason & Shannon Thompson


Dr. Shawn & "Coo" Hocker


Sandy & Don Spiers

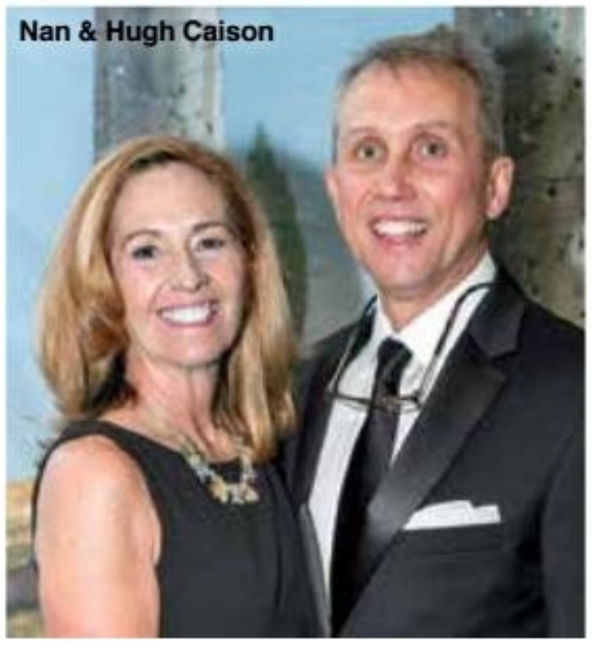
June & Steve Miller, Lisa & Tommy Catone


Dr. Charles & Carol Kays

Kelly & Chris Buffalino

Paul Lothrop, Mia Ares, Karene Eason

Jeff & Cindy Babka


Nan & Hugh Caison

Nikki Layden, Brandon Grizzle

Abby & David Torrence

Jess & Sean Ahlum

Port City People

Lunch with Chef Robert Irvine

A fundraiser benefiting the Girls Leadership Academy of Wilmington (GLOW)

Friday, February 8, 2019

Photographs by Bill Ritenour

Dan & Kiplyn Duffy

Myra Webb, Sharon Laney, Susan Lacy

Melanie Welsh, Sherri Ingle, Jill Hollows, Michelle Clark

Jackie Whitaker, Monica Johnson, Karen Laughan

Michelle Thompson, Martha Edgerton, Jessica Spencer

Nancy Pittman, Eleanor Enos, Paula Corbett

Joe Fava, Linwood Gainey, Wanda Copley, Frank Potter

Delores Rhodes, Cynthia Boylan, Margaret Hamilton

Samantha Cleary, Marie Castillo Ruiz

Emily Bogan, Tracy Gravely, April Rieger, Kristy Bryan, Katie Summering, Steph Lancaster

Sandy Spiers, Jackie Whitaker, Karen Whitaker, Kathey Delaney, Venitta Reeves, Lisa Weeks

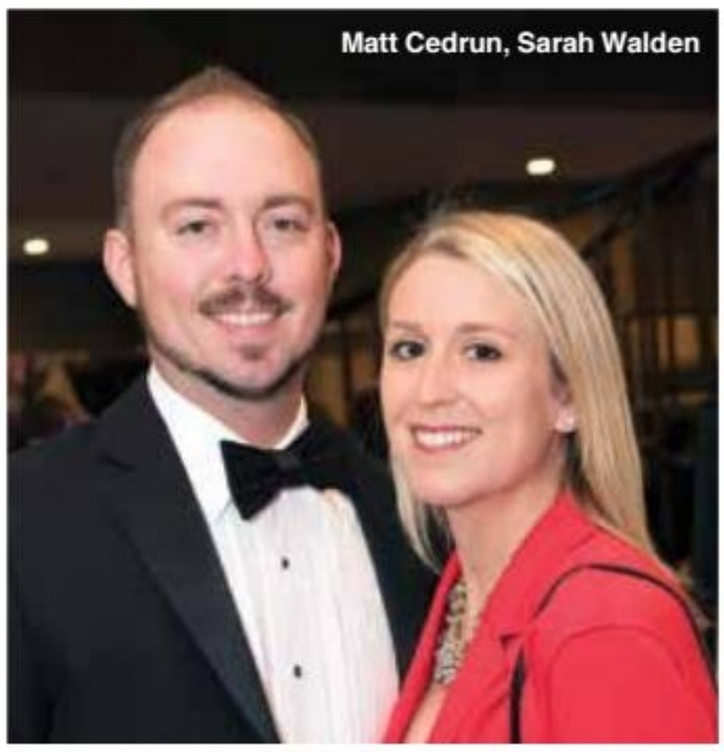
Port City People

2019 Cape Fear Heart Ball

Hosted by the Cape Fear Heart Association

Saturday, February 9, 2019

Photographs by Bill Ritenour

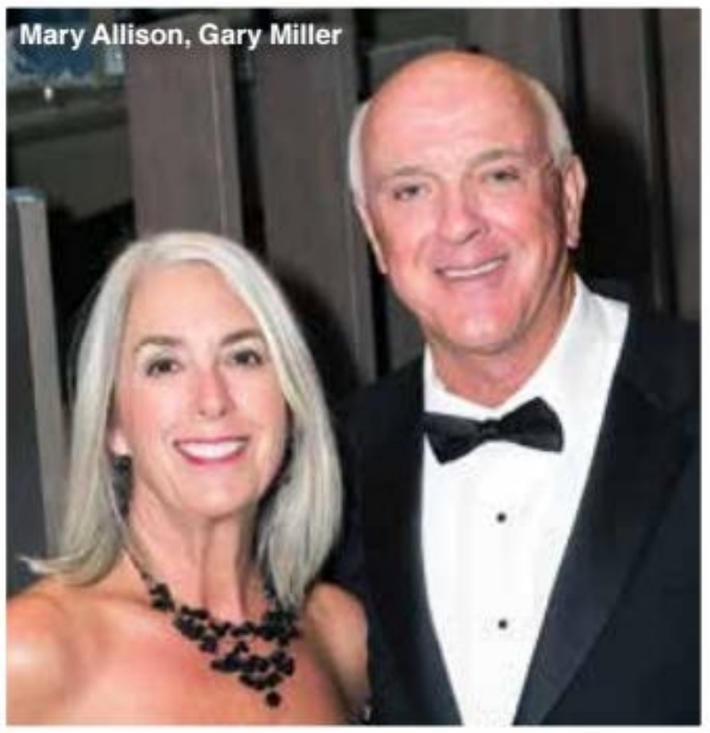

Matt Cedrun, Sarah Walden

Lisa Iyer, Dr. Sunil Iyer, Dora Daughhetee, Dr. Josh Spencer, Nicki Spencer, Dr. Linda Calhoun, Tim Calhoun

Dr. Charmaine Lewis, Dr. Michael Yarnoz

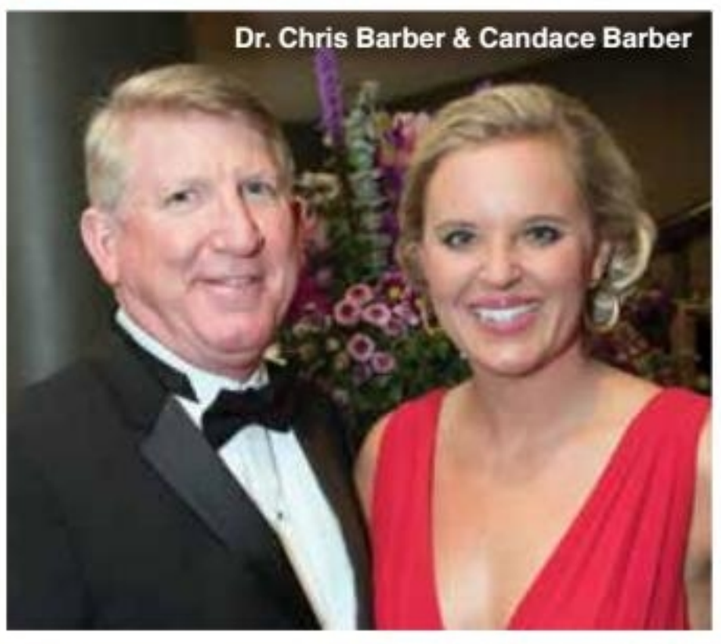
Elle & Dr. Jonathan Woods

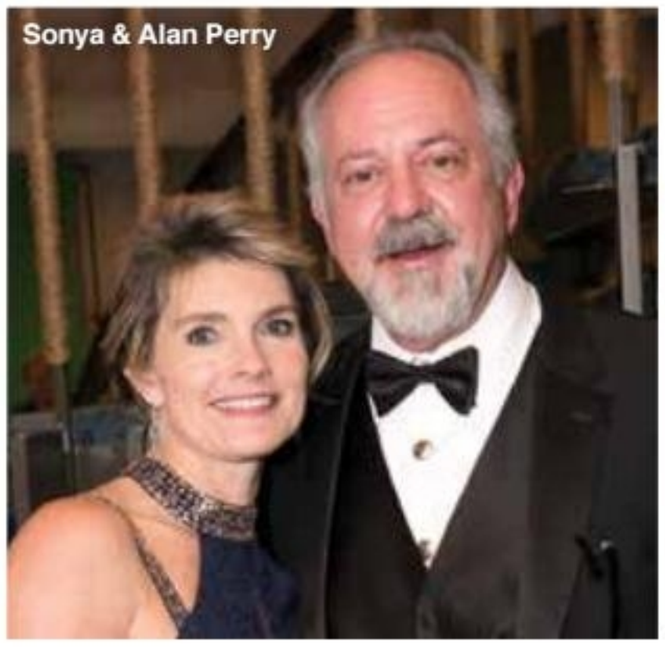
Joe & Melanie Welsh, Sandy & Don Spiers


Mary Allison, Gary Miller

Cathey Luna, Kirk Lohrli

Whitney Leonard, Ashley Miller, Kathy Gresham


Dr. Chris Barber & Candace Barber


Sonya & Alan Perry

Linwood Gainey, Joe Fava, Frank Potter

Mallory Hickey, Joseph Padgett

Port City People

8th Annual East Coast Shag Classic

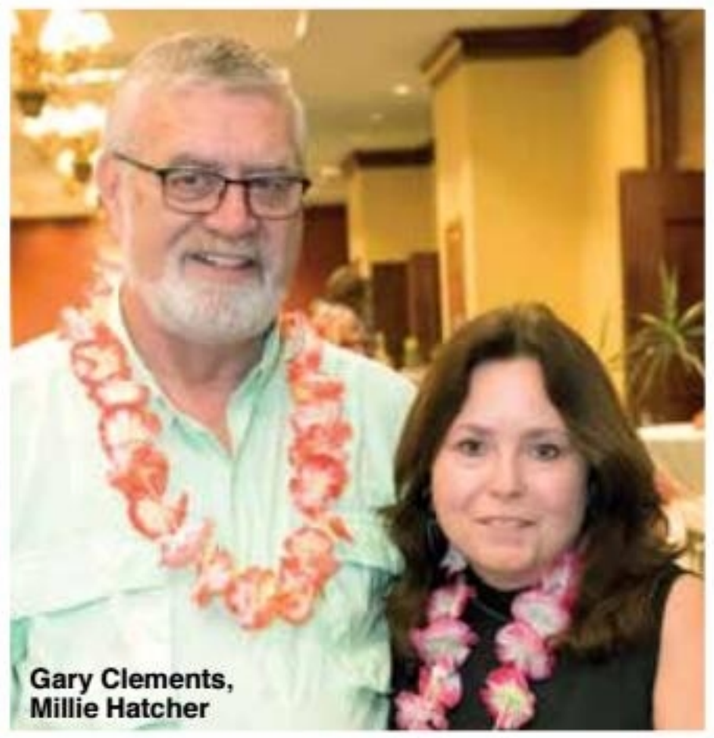
A benefit for Hope Abounds, a charitable nonprofit supporting those battling cancer

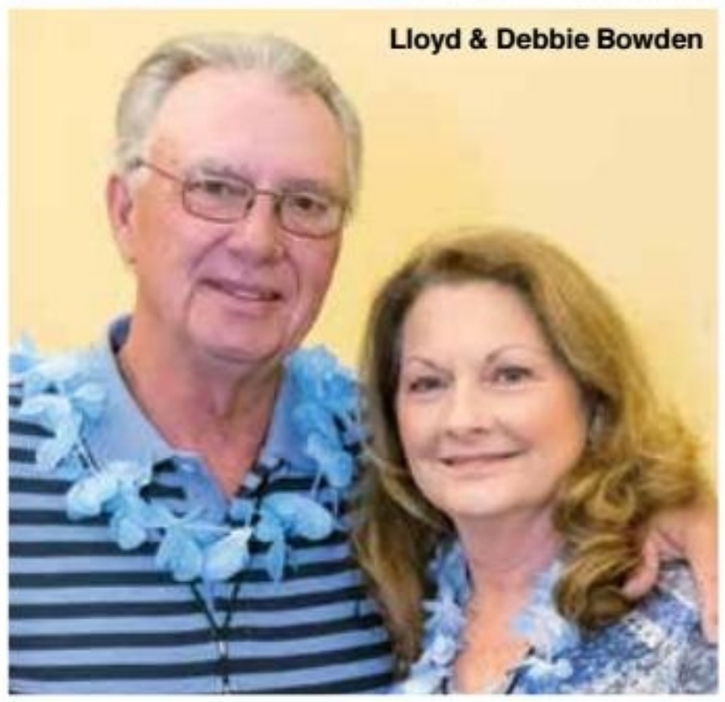
Thursday, February 7, 2019

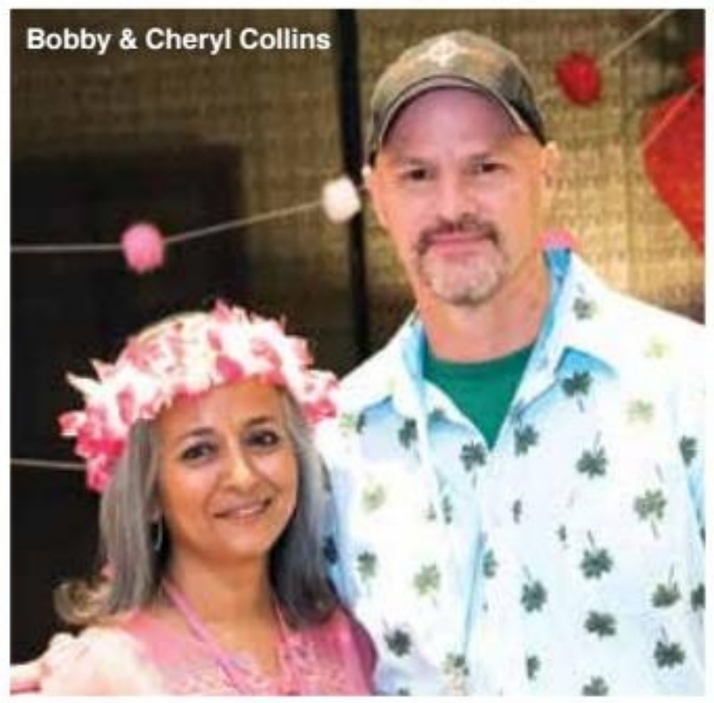
Photographs by Bill Ritenour

Pat & Lou Smith

Dru & Jime Hoge


Gary Clements, Millie Hatcher


Lloyd & Debbie Bowden


Bobby & Cheryl Collins

Denise Anderson, Bill Jirinee

Tanya & Andy Brown

Penny & Ron Mills

Kathy & Scott Boyette

Bobby Hunt, Mike Riley

Al & Vickie Kindler

Ken Barnes, Beth Justice

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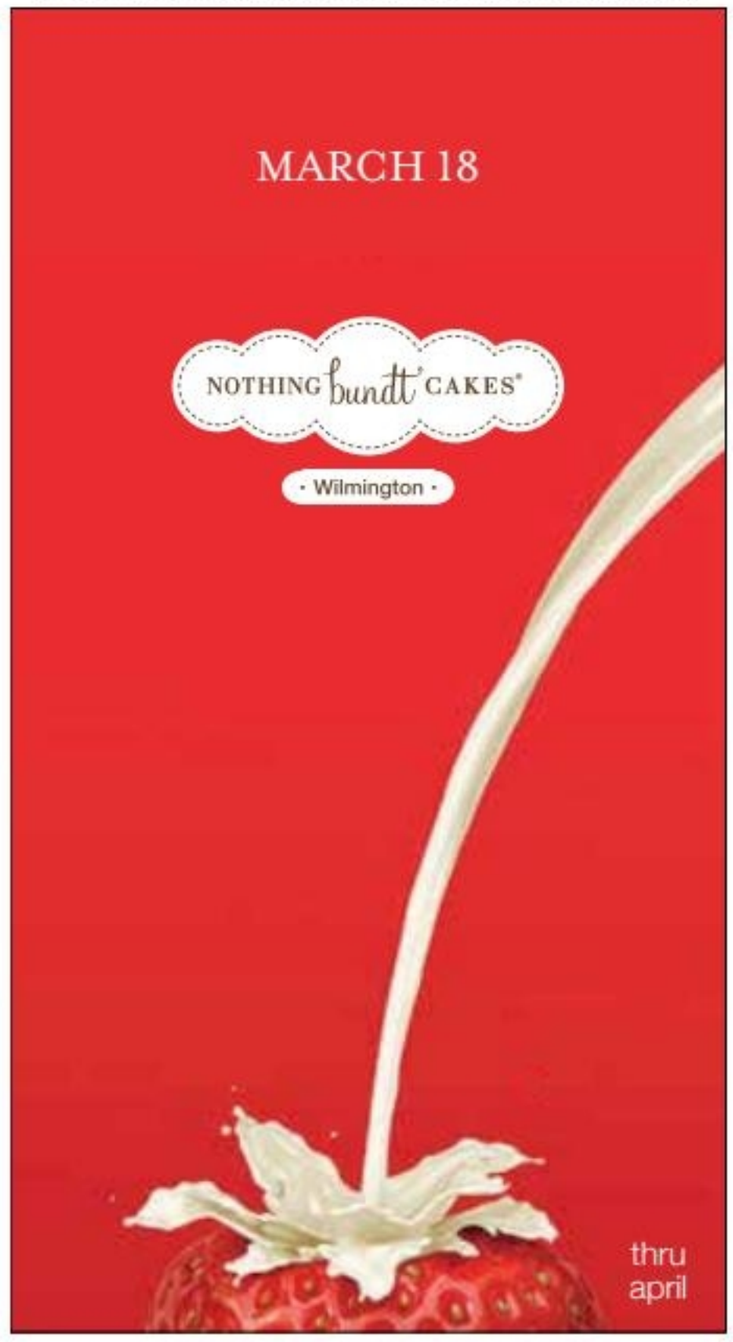

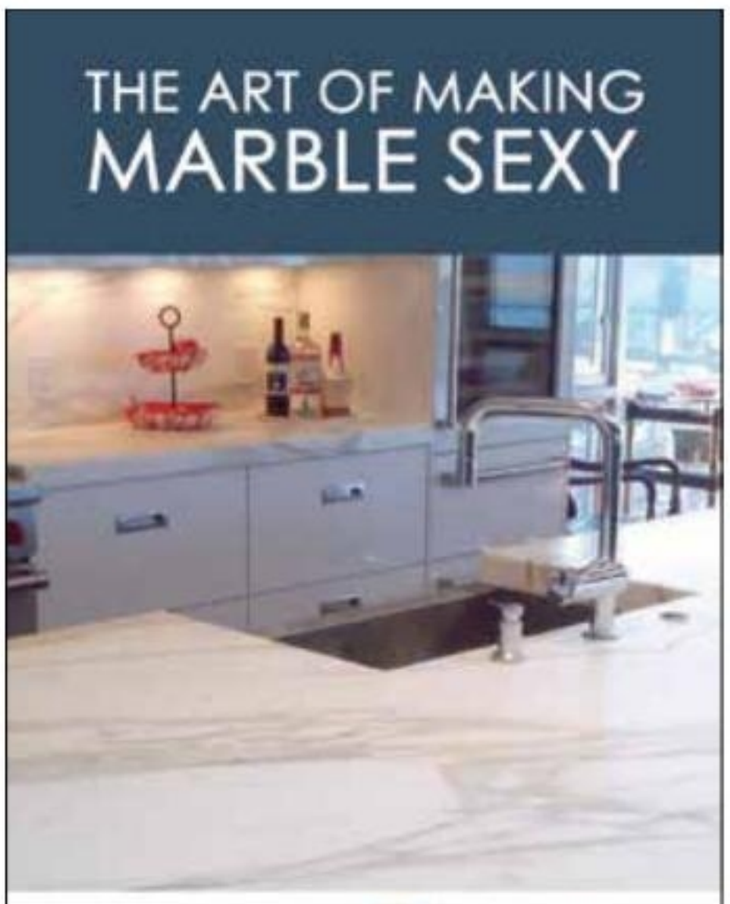

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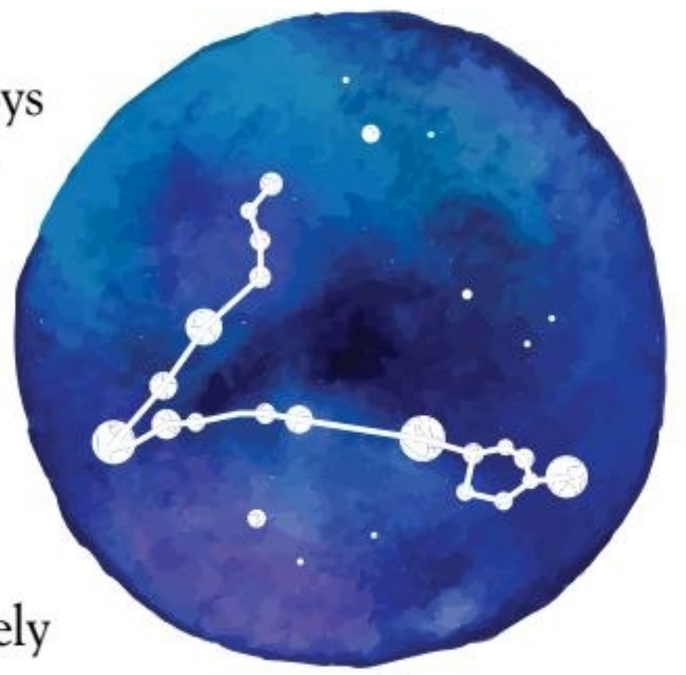
The Originals

Leave it to the March-born to break the mold

By Astrid Stellanova



March madness doesn't just apply to basketball, boys and girls. It applies to the whole universe. We astrologers already knew the universe held all kinds of spooky entanglements before the physicists did.

Happens that Fred Rogers and Albert Einstein were March-born Star Children. And so were Vincent Van Gogh and Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Quincy Jones and Aretha Franklin, too.

Creative, artistic, occasionally mystic, but almost always completely original — the birthright of those born this month.

Pisces (February 19–March 20)
Making. It. Rain. Boo-ya! That's rainmaker you this birthday and year. You roar right into the lead with one good idea after another and the energy to make them happen. If the rest of the pack cannot keep up, and not many can, then they have to eat your dust. It will be hard to dampen your enthusiasm and to contain your excitement as precious dreams are realized. Take a bow!

Aries (March 21–April 19)
You've had some hard knocks and rude shocks, most of them from thinking you could do the next to the impossible for the undermotivated. If you are feeling like the Mayor of Underachiever Town, just remember there's no way to change others and most of your suffering is from that.

Taurus (April 20–May 20)
You've been generous, Star Child, especially when out on the town, but now you're feeling hard-pressed. You act like I don't know your moola from your hula lately. As fun as it was, visit the great state of Austerity for a serious time-out. Clip both coupons and your wings for a while.

Gemini (May 21–June 20)
Careless and reckless comes to mind, my twin. Yet you wonder why you feel like you're Tito in the Jackson family? You were born with gifts and talent but you have not used them.

Cancer (June 21–July 22)
Be firm with somebody who knows how to play you. Make Midas let go of the greenbacks and be generous with you for a change. Visit places you haven't been, like the province of Reality Checkville.

Leo (July 23–August 22)
You've been spinning it to win it, like a revitalized Vanna White at the wheel. Fun to watch, and fun to be you during this sun cycle. It will delight your friends and depress your enemies to see your sparkle.

Virgo (August 23–September 22)
Darling, you've been a Jittery Joe. It is discombobulating to trade roles with a close alliance, but you have bravely experimented with self-discovery. Don't give up now; it leads you to a whole new paradigm.

Libra (September 23–October 22)
Sneaky! Those who think they can predict everything about you are going to have to put a bell around your neck to find you. You have privately begun explorations they will find amazing. Amaze yourself, too!

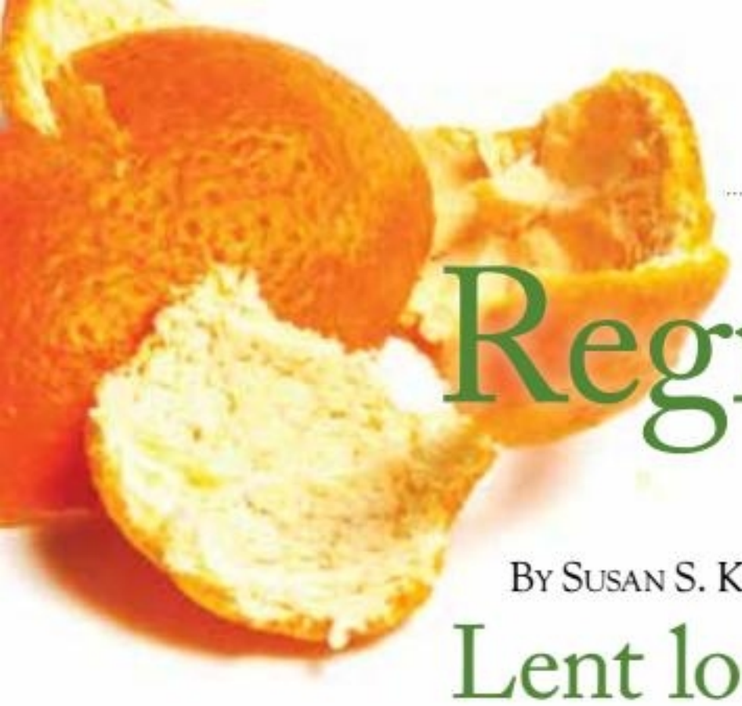
Scorpio (October 23–November 21)
Sugar, don't look back unless you plan to go that route. Now that a new endeavor is under way, all signs point to success. Keep your cool. Also, find one person who needs your mentoring. It will be a revelation.

Sagittarius (November 22–December 21)
Shake it. Bake it. But don't just lie there and take it! You are at a key place, and you've invested a lot emotionally in a good outcome. Fight for what you want, and be as inclusive as you can if you want to lead.

Capricorn (December 22–January 19)
Namaste doesn't mean nah, may stay. You may want to stay put and not budge, but where you are now is all about finding peace in a time where you feel at war with yourself.

Aquarius (January 20–February18)
In another 364 days you will ask yourself if you made a dint or difference in the world. You already have. Someone is trying to express just how important you are, and what you have done, and honor you.

For years, Astrid Stellanova owned and operated Curl Up and Dye Beauty Salon in the boondocks of North Carolina until arthritic fingers and her popular astrological readings provoked a new career path.



Regrets, I've Got a Few

The penitence of parents

By Susan S. Kelly

Lent looms and then — BOOM — the season of gloom is upon us, those 40 days and 40 nights during which one is meant to repent. But if you're a parent, guilt knows no season. It's just always around, or in literary lingo, omnipresent.

Take my 38-year-old son, who not long ago revealed to me that as a child, he used to stand over the trash can while eating cookies so he wouldn't drop crumbs on the floor. Oh, what this casual confession says. I never told him to do this; he just wanted to avoid the problem, or hearing about it. That he was so amenable pains me, the way he was when I just took him out of one school and sent him to a magnet that required a 45-minute bus ride. This would be the same son who, as a 2-year-old, kept waking at 3 a.m. for so many consecutive nights that I finally took him out of the crib, set him on the floor with a cut-up orange, and said, "Fine. Have fun. See you in the morning," and went back to bed. No wonder that, later, when he woke up sick in the middle of the night, he always walked around my side of the bed to wake his father instead. Can I catch a little slack here? I remember when I was answering so many children's questions and child-related telephone calls that I couldn't take my own temperature because I couldn't keep my mouth closed around a thermometer for three consecutive minutes.

At least I managed to rescue his brother, whom I happened upon in his room with the mini-blind cords wrapped around his neck because he'd been playing "Pirates." The same child who, because I told him to visit the dermatologist, wouldn't do anything about his warts except wrap three fingers on one hand in duct tape for six weeks because he'd heard it would make them go away.

Confession may be good for the soul, but on the whole, I think I prefer yesteryear's Lenten mite boxes, where all you had to do was part with some of your allowance. Though I probably failed in that department too, since I once discovered a child trying to extract a nickel from between the car seats with tweezers. Those kinds of memories can be assuaged with this one: How short a space in time elapsed between my daughter telling me tearfully that she didn't want me to die ("Don't worry, honey. It will be a long time before I die.") to telling me that she wished I was dead. That was probably about the same era that her phone's voicemail message was "My give-a-damn's busted." At least I escaped another friend's fate, who discovered a pamphlet titled "How to Take Care of your new Tattoo" in her daughter's Kate Spade pocketbook.

Oh, the countless little deaths I delivered, including, say, the April Fool's morning that my daughter danced into the kitchen and merrily, mischievously, announced that she hadn't done her homework. I barely looked up from the bagged lunch I was fixing in order to comply with her school's eye-rolling rule of packing no disposables, only recyclables. Would it have cost me anything to play along, to acknowledge her 7-year-old April Fool's effort? Two decades later, I still cringe at the memory.

Thank heaven that friends' stories go a long way in the "I'm Not the Only Mean Mother" department. Names have been omitted to protect the guilty, but one friend who'd reached the end of her parenting rope with her tantrum-throwing 5-year-old picked up the phone, mimicked dialing as he writhed on the floor, and said, "Hello? Yes, is this the adoption agency? I have a child available . . . " And this from another mother's shame vault: The afternoon she took the car keys and got in the car and began backing out of the driveway, all the while calling, "OK, I'm leaving now, hope you can take care of yourself," while her child wailed with despair. One acquaintance told me that when her son was disconsolate about a terrible grade he'd made on a test in fourth grade, she'd taken him in her room, sat him down, and said, "Listen. You were planned, and I know a lot of people in your class who were accidents."

Still, surely for every painful-to-recollect instance, there's a corresponding instance of sweetness, and I offer these up not as defenses, but to keep myself from weeping. Such as the child calling during his first week at boarding school, desperate with fear, panicked and frantic because he was washing clothes for the first time and "the washing machine in the basement is stuck and I'm required to wear a collared shirt to dinner and they're all in there wet" — and my assurance, four hours away, that the machine was simply between cycles, wait a few minutes and it would begin chugging again. The same child I sang "My Best Beau" to, from *Mame*, when I was rocking him to sleep as a baby. I sang "Baby Mine" from *Dumbo* to his sister in the same rocking chair. The three children whose old-boyfriend box of letters and memorabilia, whose Jack Daniel's bottle filled with sand from the summer job at the beach, and whose slab of crudely painted wood commemorated a summer camp mountain bike competition, are all still in their bedrooms somewhere, though the three themselves are long gone. You take comfort where you find it, in the baby album entries you made so as not to forget the child who said, "I did that later ago," meaning already, or "I won, now you try to win me."

And when that doesn't work, there's always the adult child to give an old scenario a new spin. "Relax, Mom," the tweezer-wielding son reminds me. "It was a *double-headed* nickel."

Terrific. Allowance issue absolved. Back to atoning.

Susan S. Kelly is a blithe spirit, author of several novels, and proud grandmother.

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